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An historical view of the  
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AN HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF  
INFIDELITY,

WITH A REFUTATION OF ITS PRINCIPLES AND REASONINGS :

IN A SERIES OF

SERMONS

PREACHED FOR THE LECTURE

FOUNDED BY THE HON. ROBERT BOYLE,

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

ST. MARY LE BOW, LONDON,

FROM THE YEAR 1802 TO 1805.

BY THE RIGHT REV.

WILLIAM VAN MILDERT, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

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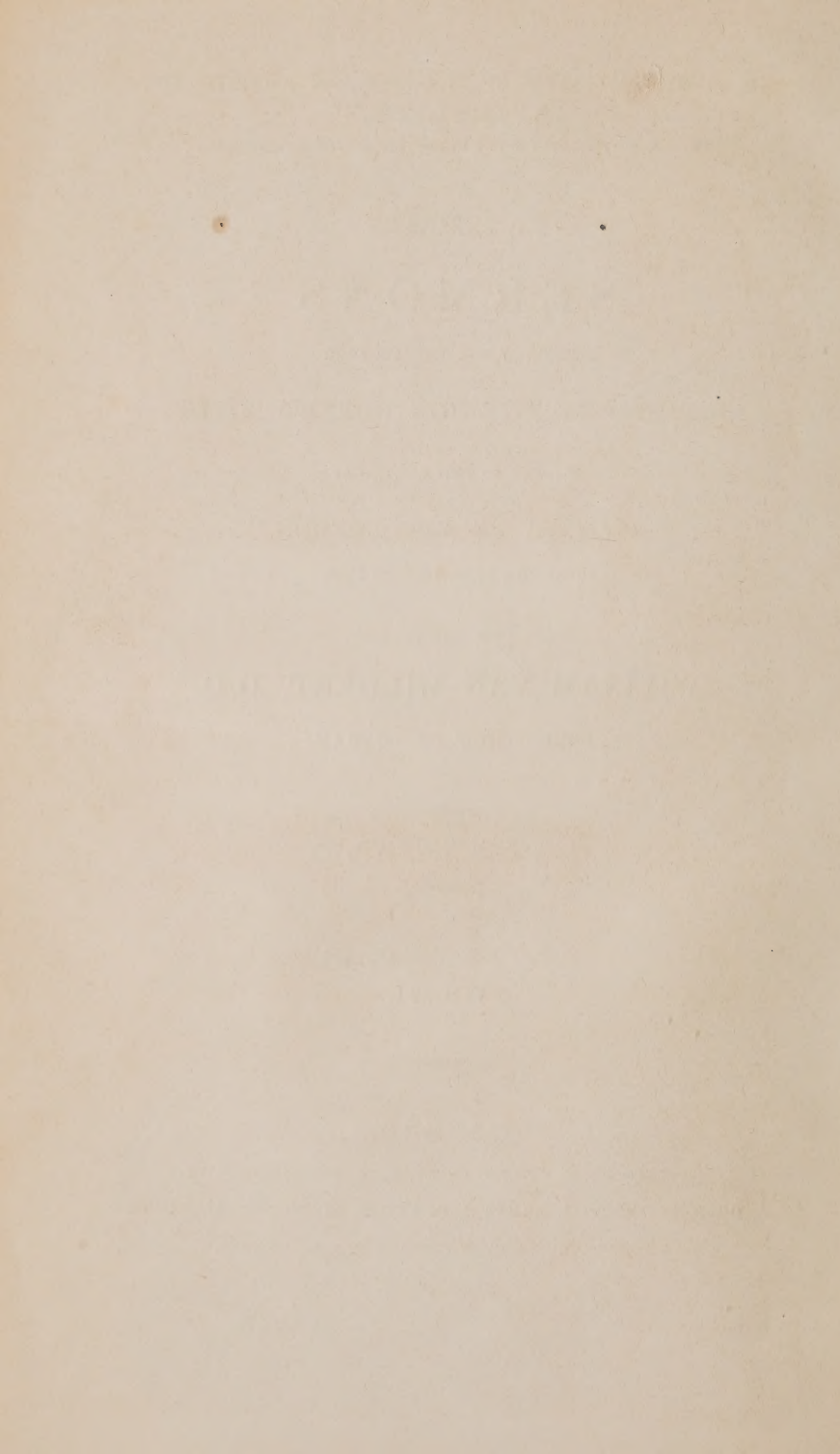
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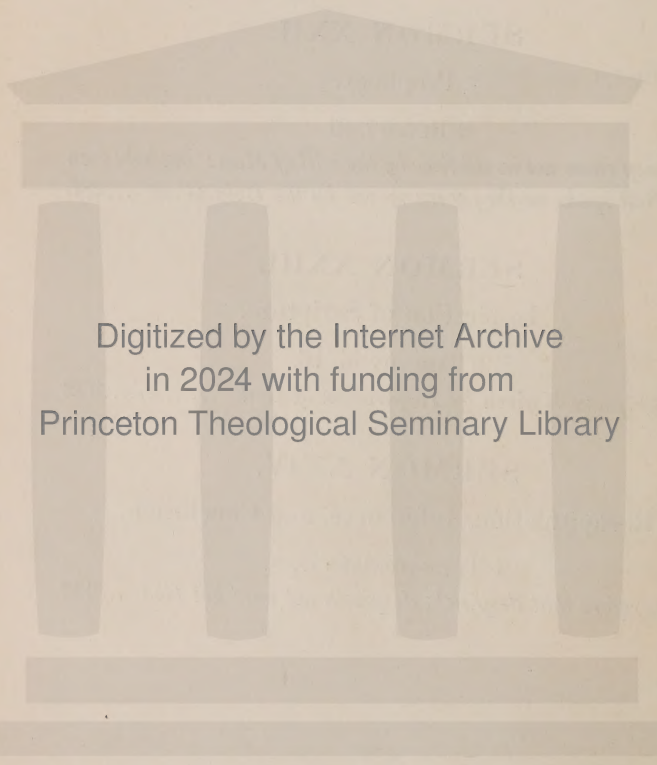
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## SERMON XIII.

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1 PETER iii. 15.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

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THAT Christianity admits of a rational “answer” to any inquiries that may be made concerning its authority and truth;—that the great importance of the “hope” which it sets before us renders it highly deserving of our best exertions to defend it against the objections of Unbelievers;—and that it is our duty to “be ready always” to enter upon its vindication, whenever occasion requires;—are positions clearly implied in this exhortation of the Apostle; the best comment on which, will be found in the conduct of the Apostles, and of succeeding luminaries in the Christian Church. From these we may learn, not only the duty of “contending for the Faith,” but the most proper

and effectual mode of conducting its defence: and since we are assured, that the adversaries of Revealed Religion will never cease to give occasion for the exercise of our zeal and ability in this respect, it behoves us carefully to examine the foundation “of the hope that is in us,” that we may “be ready to give the answer” required of us in such a manner as may not discredit the sacred cause.

To perform this duty would be a grateful task, were those whom we seek to persuade generally well disposed to receive the “answer” which they call upon us to render. But to encounter ignorance, conceit, perverseness, and malice, is a hard trial of our patience, as well as a grievous impediment to our success. Still it is our duty to persevere in the great cause which we have in hand, notwithstanding all obstacles and discouragements. We must be ready to give an answer to “every one;” not only to instruct the simple and to strengthen the feeble-minded, but, “by sound doctrine, both “to exhort and to convince the gainsayers<sup>a</sup>,” —“striving together for the faith of the “Gospel; and in nothing terrified by our “adversaries<sup>b</sup>.” Thus did the Apostles; and

<sup>a</sup> Titus i. 9.

<sup>b</sup> Phil. i. 27, 28.



so must we, if we would approve ourselves Christ's faithful disciples.

But here arises an important subject for our consideration, as to the kind of questions which may deserve an answer, and the kind of answer which ought to be given. Are we bound to notice all the captious objections that may be advanced, to clear up every difficulty that wanton ingenuity can frame, to solve every unimportant doubt; to follow "the disputer of "this world"<sup>c</sup> through all the mazes of Sophistry and Scepticism, till we are almost as much bewildered as himself, and, without hope of recovering *him* from the error of his way, are in danger of being lost *ourselves*?

There is nothing in the Apostle's exhortation, or in any other part of the sacred writings, which can be interpreted as obliging us to step beyond the line of plain and simple reasoning, in defence of our Faith; which, being intended for the acceptance of all men, is founded upon evidence level to the capacities of all men, and easy to be apprehended by such as are willing to receive it.

"Answer not a fool according to his folly,"

<sup>c</sup> I Cor. i. 20.

saith Solomon, “lest thou be like unto him :” but again, “Answer a fool according to his “folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit<sup>d</sup> :” —advice, which, if considered with reference to the present subject, may thus be paraphrased :—“Think it not necessary to refute “every futile and perverse opinion which “the irreligious Scoffer may advance ; much “less, imitate his profane and irreverent “treatment of the subject ; neither admit “the false or erroneous principles on which “his arguments are founded. But answer “him, nevertheless, if there be danger of “*his* supposing, or of its being supposed by “*others*, that he is unanswerable ; nay, refute “him, as far as may be, upon his own principles, the more fully to expose him to “shame : or else, lay open the falsity of his “principles ; and scruple not, in either case, “as far as due reverence for the subject will “permit, to use the same weapons of satire “and ridicule for the defeat of sophistry, “which he employs to subvert the most sacred truths.”

If we interpret the Apostle’s exhortation conformably to this advice, there will be no danger of its leading us astray. To “be “ready to give an answer to every man that

<sup>d</sup> Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.



“asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us,” implies that we may be called upon to do so, by persons of very different views and dispositions; not only by sincere and humble inquirers after truth, but by vain, conceited, and dogmatical men, who are perhaps persuaded that no answer *can* be given, and who only mean to mock at us when they call for one. That this answer should be given “with meekness and fear,” may therefore be deemed prudential advice respecting the *persons* with whom we are to contend, as well as a necessary caution concerning the sacredness of the *subject* to be discussed. In both points of view, it is highly important. A reverential dread of injuring such a cause by a weak and injudicious defence, ought to deter us from engaging in it with heat and precipitation; while a knowledge of the dispositions of those who are most forward to question the grounds of our belief, should make us equally careful not to afford them any advantage by our indiscretion.

It has, indeed, been suggested that St. Peter might here intend to reprove a contentious spirit on the part of the *adversary*, rather than the *apologist*, of the Gospel; since the words, “with meekness and fear,”

may be applied to the person who “asks the “reason,” as well as to him who “gives the “answer.” The words in the original are, perhaps, capable of this construction. But whether this be their true intent or not, it is evident that the “apology,” or “answer,” as our translators render it, which Christians are here required to give, does not impose an obligation to notice rude and presumptuous attacks on our Faith, or to compliment Unbelievers at the expense of sincerity and truth. On the contrary, it is but reasonable that if the believer be required to conduct the argument “with meekness “and fear,” the Unbeliever should be required to do the same: and if the latter be dissatisfied with the reasons that are given in defence of our Faith, he is bound to give as good, or even better, against it. Certainly we are not obliged to undertake the refutation of sneers, invectives, or jests on Revealed Religion; but to notice arguments only, and such arguments as may be consistent with a sincere desire of attaining the truth. It is to him who fairly asks a *reason*, that we are to give an answer; not to him that insults us with scoffing and ridicule.

Having thus considered what kind of

questions respecting our Faith ought to be regarded as worthy of attention, let us next inquire what kind of answers or arguments we may reasonably be expected to produce in its defence.

The objections alleged against Revealed Religion, and the answers given to them, may be arranged under two general heads:—arguments *à priori*, and arguments *à posteriori*; the former, intended to shew from abstract reasoning its probability or improbability; the latter, to prove or disprove by testimony the facts upon which it depends. The argument *à priori* undertakes to discuss the utility or necessity of Revelation, its dependence upon Philosophy or human Science, the analogy between Faith and Reason, the nature of the Doctrines proposed for our belief, and, in general, whatever relates to the credibility of the things revealed, considered *per se*, and independently of any external evidences of their coming from God. The argument *à posteriori*, on the other hand, treats of the external evidences only; of the general testimony by which the facts of Revealed Religion are supported, and of the particular proofs of its Miracles, its Prophecies, and its Divine Inspiration, vouchsafed for the express pur-



pose of establishing its claim to the belief and acceptance of mankind.

Before we enter upon the examination of these several topics, it may be useful to consider what degree of weight comparatively belongs to these two distinct kinds of reasoning: that we may duly appreciate their respective importance when applied to the present subject.

To an honest and ingenuous mind, it should seem that where a Divine Revelation is the subject in question, the only necessary inquiry to be made is that which relates to the *matter of fact*, whether such a Revelation has been made or not; since, upon any system not absolutely Atheistical, the Will of God, when proved to be such by its proper evidence, must be obligatory on the conscience of man, and leaves nothing for discussion, no alternative, but that of conforming to it or suffering the penalty of disobedience.

But Infidels are generally found to be more inclined to abstract reasoning on the *principles* of Revealed Religion, than to a fair and candid examination of its *proofs*. They delight to plunge into the depths of Metaphysics, to entangle their opponents in sophistical perplexities, and to maintain certain arbitrary positions of their own devising, from which,

without further inquiry, they would infer the falsehood or incredibility of Revelation. They magnify the powers of the human understanding, till they exalt it almost to the rank of a Deity ; and set up reason as an object of idolatry, whose decisions are to be revered as paramount to any *extrinsic* evidence which God can possibly give of himself. Thus assuming an undoubted right to reject any Revelation which accords not with their own notions of wisdom and expediency, they discuss with unrestrained license the counsels of the Almighty, arraign his dispensations as unjust or unwise, cavil at whatever they find in them obscure or difficult, and exercise their wit and ingenuity in holding them up to the scorn and ridicule of others.

On the other hand, it is, for the most part, rather incidentally than directly, rather covertly and with wily insinuation than by open and avowed attack, that they endeavour to overthrow the *external* evidences which stand in the way of their design. Treatises of various kind, apparently unconnected with the subject of Religion, are used as vehicles for hints respecting the want of corroborating testimony to the facts of the Old and New Testament, or for suggestions of some evidence contradictory to the sacred records

Sometimes, indeed, more undisguised attacks are made upon the veracity of the Scriptures; and we are called upon to give up certain important facts which they contain, as absolutely untenable and throwing discredit upon the whole narrative. So various and subtle are these artifices, that it is hardly possible for the most diligent or sagacious inquirer to unravel all the web of their sophistry, or trace them through their endless mazes. But it is evident that most of those who *professedly* attack Revealed Religion trust chiefly to *à priori* reasoning for their success, and either pass by the argument from its proper evidences as a matter of fact, or treat it as entirely of a subordinate and secondary nature.

In this respect it must be acknowledged that Infidels are “wise in their generation;” it being much easier to raise cavils and exceptions against Revealed Religion from its incompatibility with some preconceived opinions of their own, than to overthrow the solid basis of positive evidence on which its claims to acceptance are founded. Comparatively, little knowledge or ability is requisite to enable men to lay down arbitrary maxims of their own, or to frame rules for the regulation of the Divine conduct, and then sitting in judgment upon Revelation, to pronounce it



false and incredible if it comport not with those rules. Hence it is no wonder that this mode of proceeding is usually preferred by those who wish to subvert the foundations of our Faith; nor that it should gain many more proselytes to the cause of Unbelief, than the hard and hopeless task of disproving its external evidences.

But it would ill become the advocates of Divine Truth to submit the trial of its claims to that tribunal of human opinion, which its adversaries would thus presumptuously set up. For, whatever respect may be due to those arguments by which writers of deserved celebrity have shewn the utility, or rather the necessity, of Divine Revelation, and have vindicated the wisdom and goodness of its several Dispensations, yet never ought we to concede that the proof of its truth depends on our ability to satisfy, by arguments of such a description, those who cavil at its system. Our Faith is founded upon the basis of *fact*, not of *opinions*; and it is to be proved, like all other matters of fact, by historical testimony. By testimony, divine as well as human, it is firmly supported: by testimony, which none of its opponents have yet been able to invalidate. It is, therefore, hardly to be expected, that we should go forth and engage the adversary in a wide and open

field of controversy, to the neglect of this impregnable fortress of our Faith. Rather ought we to follow the advice of the Royal Psalmist :—"Walk about Sion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses, that ye may tell them that come after".

Indeed, when the nature of the argument *à priori* is considered, it appears to be a kind of reasoning which can hardly, without arrogance, be applied to the subject of Revealed Religion. For, unless we presume that our understanding and knowledge are commensurate with those of the Supreme Being, how shall we venture to decide upon the fitness, expediency, and wisdom of that which is proposed to us, under the sanction of positive external evidence, as a communication of the Divine will? That men should not give implicit belief to any system which thus professes to be of Divine authority, without due inquiry into the *testimony* by which it is supported, is highly reasonable; nay, it is their duty to make that inquiry, as far as they have opportunity and ability so to do. But to claim a right, even after sufficient evidence has been given of its being really "the work of God," to question its expediency and to weigh it in the balance of our finite

<sup>u</sup> Ps. xlviii. 11, 12.

understandings, appears to be no less presumptuous and indecent, than to arraign the wisdom and goodness of the works of Creation, notwithstanding the manifold proofs of their proceeding from an infinitely perfect Author.

It will be perceived, however, that these observations are only applicable where the Divine authority of any Religion is already sufficiently attested by its proper external evidences; in opposition to *which only*, it is contended that all *à priori* reasoning on the purport of the Divine communication must be insufficient to overthrow its authority, being no better than reasoning against fact, or opposing human opinion and conceit to infinite wisdom and knowledge.

According to this view of the subject, we might now proceed without further preface to inquire what are those proper external evidences, which sufficiently prove a Religion to be of Divine origin, and which (as we maintain) bear decisive testimony to the Christian Faith.

But there are strong reasons, notwithstanding what has just been advanced, why we should not dismiss the argument *à priori* from a more particular consideration.

The popular objection, that "Christianity



“ is not founded on Argument,” and therefore must be irrational and untrue, has been often urged against those who contend for receiving it on the sole ground of Faith in the revealed Will of God. This objection may easily be removed, by shewing that the Faith for which we contend presupposes certain *Facts*, on which our Belief is founded, and of which the Evidences are so strong as to make it *irrational not* to believe them. These Facts being admitted, Faith, in the religious acceptance of the word, is resolved into an implicit reliance on the *veracity of God*, which may justly be considered as one of the highest acts of Reason. There is, therefore, nothing like weak credulity in Faith, thus understood; nor any want of sound and solid argument, by which it may be supported. Its foundation is Trust in God’s Word, accompanied with positive and substantial Evidence that God hath spoken. Hence, to say that Christianity is not founded on Argument, if by Argument be meant *à priori or abstract Reasoning*, is no valid objection to its Truth; because it depends not on *such Reasoning*, but on matters of Fact. But to say, that it is not founded on Argument, meaning that there is no good Argument for believing it, is untrue, or is, at least, assuming the very point in dispute; be-

cause, if it be supported by incontrovertible Facts, it is not wanting in the best of all Arguments for our belief and acceptance.

But to prepare the way for a fuller discussion of the reasonableness of such a Faith as this, and to prove that it is the only true and proper principle of Religion, it will be of great use to show on what an unsubstantial basis the most plausible schemes of Infidelity are built; that when Faith (such a faith as is here described) is discarded, there remains nothing by which any system of Religion can be supported; that human science cannot instruct us in things divine; that Philosophy and Theology are branches of knowledge entirely distinct, both as to their principles and their objects; that the Light of Nature can never supply the place of the Light of Revelation, as to the discovery of those truths which concern us as spiritual beings; and that Faith in the Revealed Will of God is, therefore, the only sure foundation of Religious Truth.

These points being established, it will appear that the kind of reasoning in which Unbelievers are desirous that we should chiefly engage, can be of little effect in either confirming or weakening the truth of Revealed Religion. It is, therefore, not so much for

the purpose of bringing forward any direct proofs of the truth of Revelation itself, (which depends on evidence of a different kind for its main support,) as for the exposure of the false principles of its opponents, that a more particular consideration of the argument *à priori* becomes expedient. It is, in short, for the purpose of showing its insufficiency to overthrow the foundations of the Gospel: the first principle of which is, “that our faith “should not stand in the wisdom of men, “but in the power of God<sup>x</sup>.”

It may further serve to lessen our esteem for this kind of reasoning, so far as we are Believers in Revealed Religion, that it does not appear to be sanctioned either by the practice or by the injunctions of our Lord or his Apostles. When our Lord said to the Jews, “Why even of yourselves judge ye “not what is right<sup>y</sup>?” he made no appeal from Divine to human wisdom, or from reason enlightened by Revelation to Reason judging by the light of Nature; but he appealed to the Jews as already in possession of the Revealed Word of God, and he called upon them to Judge *by that Word* of the evidences of his mission, and the truth of his doctrine. He could not be supposed to mean, Why do

<sup>x</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 5.

<sup>y</sup> Luke xii. 57.



ye not judge of the Religion which I propose to you by your own opinions of its wisdom and expediency? but, Why do ye not judge rightly concerning it from your own Scriptures; in which every thing relating to me is so clearly revealed? and why do ye not discern “the signs of the times<sup>a</sup>,” which exactly correspond with what your own Prophets have foretold? To these Scriptures he referred; resting his claims on writings which they acknowledged to be of Divine authority, and the truth of which also depended upon facts, not upon abstract reasoning. His appeal, therefore, was “to the Law, and to the “Testimony<sup>b</sup>,” which came from God; not to the fallible judgment of man. At other times, he urged his *Miracles* as affording incontrovertible proofs of his Divine mission. “The *works* that I do, bear witness of me, “that the Father hath sent me<sup>c</sup>;” and again, “If I had not done among them the works “which none other man did, they had not “had sin<sup>d</sup>.” In all this we see nothing like a recommendation to examine his *doctrine* first, and to suspend their belief of his testimony until they had satisfied themselves by that previous examination; but they were

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xvi. 3.

<sup>b</sup> Isa. viii. 20.

<sup>c</sup> John v. 36.

<sup>d</sup> John xv. 24.

called upon, authoritatively, to believe the *testimony* which he produced, and for the sake of that to receive his doctrine. This disposition to “do the will of God,” whenever it should be clearly revealed to them, he declared to be a necessary qualification, to enable them to “know of the doctrine, whether “it were of God<sup>d</sup>.”

The Apostles vindicated the Gospel in the same manner. St. Peter, indeed, enjoins us to be ready to give an answer, when we are asked a *reason* of the hope that is in us; but that reason must be supposed to have reference to the facts upon which it is grounded. St. Paul likewise speaks of Christianity as a “reasonable service<sup>e</sup>,” and “worthy of all acceptance<sup>f</sup>.” But by him, as well as by St. Peter and the other Apostles, the reasonableness of believing and obeying the Gospel is evidently inferred from the “many infallible proofs<sup>g</sup>” with which it was accompanied of its proceeding from God; from its being attested by “so great a cloud of witnesses<sup>h</sup>,” by such “signs and wonders<sup>i</sup>,” and indisputable “demonstrations of the Spirit “and of power<sup>k</sup>,” that it could not be rejected, without resisting the clearest and strongest

<sup>d</sup> John vii. 17.    <sup>e</sup> Rom. xii. 1.    <sup>f</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15.    <sup>g</sup> Acts i. 3.

<sup>h</sup> Heb. xii. 1.    <sup>i</sup> Acts ii. 22.    <sup>k</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 4.

evidences of a Divine original which it is possible to produce.

In after-times, we find the Fathers of the Christian Church “contending earnestly for “the Faith once delivered to the Saints” by arguments of a similar kind. They prove its authority, for the most part, by producing testimonies that the written word contained a faithful narrative of those facts on which the credibility of the Gospel depended. That some of them were led (from a desire, perhaps, of refuting vain Sophists on their own principles) to defend Christianity by reasoning drawn from the Philosophy of the age they lived in, must indeed be acknowledged. But, that little service (or, rather, much disservice) was hereby done to the cause of Truth, there is too much reason to believe: and we have occasion, perhaps, to regret that these venerable and truly learned Advocates for the Gospel ever departed from the plainer and more direct mode of proof, that of substantiating its *facts* by their proper evidence, and inculcating a reliance upon *them* as sufficient vouchers of its Divine authority.

In these latter times, the proofs of Christianity from its external evidence, are, of necessity, rendered more complex, from the

<sup>1</sup> Jude, ver. 3.

remoteness of the events relating to it ; and more diligent investigation is now requisite, in order to establish the authenticity of its records. But this small increase of difficulty would easily be surmounted, and the labour of the research amply compensated, by the vast accession of corroborative proof from the concurrent testimony of so long a series of ages, as well as by the intervening fulfilment of many Christian Prophecies ; had not vanity or perverseness inclined too many among us to desert this most important ground of our Faith, for one in which the pride of human wisdom may find ampler scope for its corrupt gratification. In this charge, it is to be feared, that some of the friends as well as most of the enemies of the Gospel may too justly be implicated. Hence, multitudes of treatises have issued from the Press, assailing the wisdom and expediency of the Divine dispensations in the Redemption of mankind, with arguments grounded, not unfrequently, on principles erroneously admitted or approved by the professed Advocates of Divine truth : while these, on the other hand, from a fond persuasion of the competency of the human understanding to grasp so vast a subject as none, perhaps, but the Divine Intellect itself can adequately comprehend, perplex them-



selves with vain endeavours to elude the consequences of their own concessions, rather than have recourse to the plainer mode of vindicating Revealed Religion, (though to the pride of human reason less gratifying,) that of a direct appeal to the facts on which its authority depends.

This conduct, on the part of those who are really persuaded of the truth of Revelation, is the more astonishing, when we consider how short and clear are the true “reason of “the hope that is in us,” and the answer to all the sophistical objections to it which Infidels may be able to advance. We trust in God’s *veracity*, and know that whatever comes from Him must be true. But the Christian Revelation is *proved to come from Him*, by the signs and wonders, by the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, with which it was accompanied. *Therefore*, we deem it both “faithful, and worthy of all acceptation.” The Infidel is challenged, either to disprove the premises of this argument, or to shew the fallacy of its conclusion. If he be unable to do either, let him confess, that we have “reason” to say with St. Paul, “we know “*whom* we have believed<sup>1</sup>,” and let him take for a final “answer” to every objection that

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

he can frame to the Revelation itself, after having in vain endeavoured to set aside its evidences, the same Apostle's decisive reply, "Let God be true, and every man a liar<sup>m</sup>."

But many are of opinion that it is unsatisfactory to rest the proofs of Christianity *solely* on this foundation. They regard it as injurious to its character, to stop here, and not engage in a more particular vindication of it as a system of wisdom and goodness, against the imputation of its irreconcilableness with our natural notions of rectitude and fitness. Thus it has been said by one learned Writer, (and the same in substance has been said by many others,) "that a Revelation opposite to the nature and reason of things is a contradiction in terms; and therefore that no external evidence whatsoever can establish the divinity of a Religion, which carries within it such unquestionable proofs of a different origin<sup>n</sup>."

Opportunity for a fuller discussion of several points involved in this argument will hereafter occur. For the present it may suffice to observe, that, to suppose in the human mind such a previous knowledge of the nature and reason of things as will enable it to de-

<sup>m</sup> Rom. iii. 4.  
page 36.

<sup>n</sup> Bandinel's Bampton Lect. Sermon II.

cide in every case, how far Revelation is opposite to or reconcilable with them, is to suppose the very thing in question, and is to ascribe to the human mind such intellectual power as probably belongs not to man. To suppose likewise that a well-attested Revelation, accompanied with all the external evidences that can be given of Divine authority, *may* nevertheless be opposite to the nature and reason of things, is to suppose what ought not to be supposed ; since it seems not only improbable, but impossible, that this should ever take place. But, although it must be admitted that such a Revelation “is a contradiction in terms,” yet that a Revelation may, in certain particulars, *seem* to our finite and narrow conceptions to be of such a description, is no contradiction whatever ; as, in the further progress of this inquiry, will, it is hoped, be sufficiently proved.

But that no disparagement may seem to be offered to that holy Faith for whose Divine authority we contend, we may venture to add, that even on this their favourite ground of *à priori* reasoning Infidels have been repeatedly defeated, and every fair or plausible objection which they have been able to advance has received a solid and convincing answer. It is not, therefore, so much from an apprehension

that the Adversary can even here gain any material advantage over us, that this mode of treating the subject is considered to be comparatively ineligible, as from a persuasion of its inferior utility. If those who have recourse to it would be content to urge it as only of collateral or secondary, not of direct and primary, importance, their modest and cautious use of it might readily be allowed. But when it is insisted, (as it has been by many,) that it ought to take *precedence* of the other mode of proof, that it is of absolute necessity as the preliminary step to our belief, nay, that it is of sufficient weight to overbalance any *quantum* of testimony that can be put into the opposite scale; *then* it becomes necessary to resist its pretensions; then it becomes necessary to shew its comparative insignificance, and to insist upon the obligation of yielding our opinions to the declarations of Infinite Wisdom, and bringing our very thoughts into captivity to our obedience to His Will.

The course, therefore, which it is intended to pursue in the subsequent inquiry, is to treat distinctly of the two great branches of the subject, the *principles* and the *evidences* on which our Faith is grounded; with a view to expose the false Reasoning of our



Adversaries respecting both, and to shew that the objections urged against the Christian Revelation are manifestly founded in *presumption* or in *falsehood*.

Under the first head (the investigation of the *principles* of our Faith) will be considered, in refutation of the chief objections urged by Unbelievers, the inability of man to frame a Religion for himself; the insufficiency of Philosophy, natural, moral, or metaphysical, to guide us to Religious Truth; the reasonableness and necessity of taking Faith for our guide, in subjects inscrutable to our natural faculties; the limits which ought to be prescribed to human reason, in exercising its judgment on any supposed Revelation from God; and the preparatory dispositions, requisite for enabling us to form a correct judgment of the evidences on which it depends. These topics will afford scope for a discussion of all that can be urged, in the way of reasoning *à priori*, either to corroborate or invalidate the proofs of Revealed Religion.

Under the next head will be stated at large the nature of the argument *à posteriori*, as applied to Revealed Religion; the comparative force of human and Divine Testimony, and the concurrence of both, to

establish the facts of Holy Writ; the great general argument for the truth of the Christian Religion, from its accomplishment, propagation, and success, that is, from the impossibility of such a design being carried on through all ages of the world, from the Fall of man to the coming of Christ and thenceforward to the present day, by any human wisdom or power; also, the more direct and positive proofs of its Divine origin, from Miracles, Prophecy, and the Inspiration of the Sacred Books. These, as well as the preceding topics, will be considered with especial reference to the Arguments by which Unbelievers have endeavoured to deprive us of the main proofs on which our Religion depends.

The plan here sketched out is designed rather to repel the assaults of Infidels and to obviate their objections, than to exhibit a full and complete elucidation of the whole body of evidence by which our Faith is supported. The proofs of its truth have, indeed, been so often detailed and arranged in systematic order by writers of the first eminence, as to render any further attempt of the kind superfluous. But, in the method here proposed, opportunities will be afforded to place the most important of these proofs

in a conspicuous point of view, as well as to lay open the sophistry of the Adversary, and break down some of his strongest holds. Thus too, it is presumed, will this second part of our subject be found correspondent with the first; and the argumentative, no less than the historical investigation will serve to shew the true Origin of Infidelity, and the perverseness and folly of Unbelievers, who are, as the Apostle most truly describes them, “deceivers and being deceived.”

To aim at *novelty*, on a subject like this, would betray an ignorance of the subject itself; which has so often been discussed as to admit of no material accessions to the arguments on either side. No less presumptuous, perhaps, were it, to expect to awaken the stubborn Infidel to a sense of his error or his danger. But if we can in any wise contribute to fix the wavering, to strengthen the feeble-minded, or to increase our own confidence in the Faith which we have embraced; the labour, we trust, will be accepted, for *His* sake to whose glory it is directed. Let our inquiries be carried on “with meekness and fear,” and accompanied with earnest supplications for the Divine blessing on our endeavours; and confidently may

it be predicted, that we shall find no reason to be “ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,” but more and more abundant cause to rejoice in the hope which is set before us, as “an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast<sup>o</sup>,” and to rely on its efficacy, as “the power of God unto Salvation<sup>p</sup>.”

<sup>o</sup> Heb. vi. 19.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. i. 16.



## SERMON XIV.

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1 COR. iii. 11.

*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid,  
which is Jesus Christ.*

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TO attempt the construction of an edifice, without first laying a firm and solid foundation;—to infer conclusions as certain, without previous assurance of the truth of the premises;—or to advance theorems in science, without axioms or data to support them;—would be justly considered as sure indications of ignorance, perverseness, or a disordered understanding. Yet similar to these absurdities is that of the Infidel, who endeavours to devise a Religion of his own without the aid of Revelation. This seems to be intimated by St. Paul, when, in censuring the *heretical* teachers of his day, he affirms (what is equally conclusive against *all* who would impose upon us religious systems of their own invention) “*other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid,*

“ which is Jesus Christ ;”—implying, that when men disregard the *revealed* will of God, they are unable to frame any consistent scheme of Religion, for want of *foundation*, that is, for want of sure and solid *principles*, on which to ground their opinions.

This fundamental defect in all endeavours to attain to religious knowledge without help from above, demands particular consideration ; since it tends most effectually to prove the insecure and hazardous nature of those systems, which men have had the presumption to propose, as of equal stability with the stupendous work of the Christian Redemption.

The desire of making a Religion for himself, instead of submitting to that which God is pleased to reveal to him, appears to have been the prevailing folly of man from the beginning. “ Vain man,” says the Scripture, “ would be wise ¶ :”—he presumes to sit in judgment on the propriety of the Divine commands ; to make the conformity of the Divine dispensations to his own notions of fitness and expediency, the sole criterion of their equity and wisdom ; to provide for himself the means of salvation and acceptance with God ; in short, to act as if he

¶ Job xi. 12.

were an *independent* being, self-created, self-redeemed, self-sanctified. By this false wisdom, the first man lost Paradise: and by pride of a similar kind, thousands of his descendants daily forfeit their title to the Tree of Life.

But if we bring these lofty pretensions to the test of sound reason and sober experience, considering what it is which man thus assumes an ability to perform, and how far he has ever yet succeeded in the attempt; we shall have abundant cause to adopt the language of the Psalmist;—“There be many that say, Who will shew us  
“any good?—Lord! lift THOU up the light of  
“*thy* countenance upon us<sup>r</sup>.”

The foundation of all Religion is the knowledge of the true God, and of his Will with respect to us. A Religion which gives us not this information, deserves not the name of Religion. It is none; or worse than none;—because, instead of instructing us in what is necessary for our well-being, it either deludes us with false hopes, or alarms us with groundless fears, and becomes destructive both of our present comfort and our everlasting welfare.

Towards proving how much knowledge of

<sup>r</sup> Psal. iv. 6.

this kind it is possible for man to obtain by the light of Nature only, it is of importance, in the first place, to know *what has ever yet been done by him, without help from Revelation.*

But this it does not appear that we have any means of ascertaining; since, as far as history can guide us, we have no reason to believe that man was ever placed in such a predicament; but that, even in the darkest and most corrupt periods, he derived *some* portion of knowledge, however scanty and insufficient, from those fragments of early Revelations, which tradition had preserved to him. So that what we usually call a state of nature, is more properly a state of *traditional* knowledge, in which though Revealed Religion may have been greatly obscured and defaced, yet in no instance, perhaps, has it been entirely obliterated.

There is no difficulty, however, in ascertaining what has actually been accomplished, in a condition the *nearest* to the supposed state of Nature of any which has hitherto been known. And if, notwithstanding the advantages of those glimmerings of Revelation, it shall appear that men have been unable to arrive at the knowledge of what is necessary for their salvation, it cannot be



unreasonable to conclude, that much less would they be able to acquire it, if the light of Revelation were totally extinguished.

Let us, then, fairly inquire into the attainments of the Heathen world, before the coming of Christ, and into those of barbarous and uncivilized countries in the present day:—for, as to the labours of Deistical Philosophers in *Christian* countries, *their* testimony, on such a point, is for obvious reasons inadmissible.

Understanding, then, by the supposed state of Nature, a state in which men have not the means of knowing the revealed Will of God, *as such*, although what little knowledge they have of Divine truths may have been derived from obscure tradition of those truths revealed in the earliest ages to mankind; the condition of those countries which are *at this day* ignorant of the Gospel, would afford, perhaps, the most decisive evidence for our purpose; because, from the long continuance of their deplorable debasement and corruption, they appear to be placed in almost as helpless and hopeless circumstances, as if they had sprung from a race of beings to whom the light of Revelation had never been vouchsafed.

But respecting these unhappy objects of

our pity and concern little dispute can arise: since, notwithstanding the attempts of some superficial Theorists to gloss over the almost brutish ignorance of these savage tribes, it will hardly be contended by thinking and sober-minded men, that they furnish us with any proof of the capability of the human mind to attain, *without instruction*, to the knowledge of Divine Truth. Dismissing, therefore, any particular consideration of *their* case, let us confine ourselves to a few brief observations on the ancient Gentile world.

St. Paul's description of the spiritual condition of the Heathen<sup>s</sup>, is generally allowed to be a faithful representation: and it exhibits in such striking colours their ignorance of the fundamental truths of Religion, and the insufficiency of their notions of moral good and evil to prevent them from practising and even deliberately approving the grossest vices and enormities, that to plead, with such an example before us, for the ability of human reason, without the help of Revelation, to make men "wise unto "salvation," appears to be a vain and extravagant undertaking.

Now, this (let it be remembered) was in-

<sup>s</sup> Rom. i. ver. 18. to the end.

tended as a portraiture of the Heathen world in general, not merely of the ignorant vulgar, but also of the most learned and accomplished characters of Greece and Rome. It was a picture drawn at a period of great refinement; after the talents of such men as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, had been constantly exercised in endeavouring to enlighten and improve mankind. Here, then, all appears to have been done which it was possible to do by the *natural* powers of man, (understanding by that expression the powers of man unaided by Revelation,) towards the acquisition of moral and religious truth: and the result, not only according to the Apostle's representation, but according to the repeated confessions of the greatest Philosophers, was plainly this:—that the utmost stretch of their researches terminated in mere *opinion* and *conjecture*; that for these they were more indebted to obscure and uncertain *traditions* than to any clear deductions from principles of their own discovery; that their labours were not sufficient even to preserve themselves from doubt and error, much less to recover others from idolatry and corruption; and that nothing further was to

be expected, nothing further was attainable, but by a Revelation from Heaven.

To those who are open to conviction and are willing to take *facts* for the basis of their reasoning, this statement of the case of the Heathen world will appear decisive of the controversy. But there are some who, in their zeal to magnify man's natural resources, and to disparage the blessing of Revelation, will hardly admit the confessions of Heathen themselves as evidence to this point; nor will they allow that the defects of these ancient Philosophers (supposing them to be as great as they are here represented to be) afford satisfactory proof that the powers of the human understanding are not *now* improvable, to a much greater extent than they were in ancient times. They contend that the world was then in the infancy of knowledge; and argue as if the illustrious sages of old, (whom they nevertheless sometimes extol in terms of extravagant panegyric,) were very babes in Philosophy, such as the wise ones of later ages regard with a sort of contemptuous commiseration.

But may we not be permitted to ask, whence this assumed superiority of modern



over ancient Philosophers has arisen? and whence the extraordinary influx of light upon these latter times has been derived? Is there any one so infatuated by his admiration of the present age, as seriously to think that the intellectual powers of man are stronger and more perfect now than they were wont to be; or that the particular talents of himself or any of his cotemporaries are superior to those which shone forth in the luminaries of the Gentile world? Do the names even of Locke, Cudworth, Cumberland, Clarke, Wilkins, or Wollaston, (men so justly eminent in modern times, and who laboured so indefatigably to perfect the theory of Natural Religion,) convey to us an idea of greater intellectual ability, than those of the consummate Masters of the Portico, the Grove, or the Lyceum? How is it, then, that the advocates for the natural perfection, or perfectibility, of human Reason, do not perceive, that, for all the superiority of the present over former times, with respect to Religious Knowledge, we must be indebted to *some intervening cause*, and not to any actual enlargement of the human faculties? Is it to be believed that any man of the present age, of whatever natural talents he may be possessed, could have

advanced one step beyond the Heathen Philosophers in his pursuit of Divine Truth, had he lived in *their* times, and enjoyed only the light which was bestowed upon *them*? Or can it fairly be proved, that merely by the light of Nature, or by reasoning upon such data only as men possess who never heard of Revealed Religion, any moral or religious truth has been discovered, since the days when Athens and Rome affected to give laws to the intellectual, as well as to the political, world? That great improvements have since been made in framing systems of Ethics, of Metaphysics, and of what is called Natural Theology, need not be denied. But these improvements may easily be traced to one obvious cause, the widely-diffused light of the Gospel, which, having shone with more or less lustre on all nations, has imparted even to the most simple and illiterate of the sons of men, such a degree of knowledge on these subjects as, without it, would be unattainable by the most learned and profound.

Having thus suggested a few observations, to shew, from the experience of past and present times, that the mere light of Nature never *did* enable men to arrive at the knowledge of Divine Truths, we might now

proceed to combat the Unbeliever on his own ground, and to prove, by arguments drawn from a consideration of the faculties of the human mind, and the objects with which only it is naturally conversant, that Reason, unenlightened by Revelation, never *can* arrive at such knowledge, from a total want of *foundation* on which to establish its positions.

But before we enter upon this proof, it may be necessary, for the satisfaction of the Believer rather than of the Infidel, to consider what the *Scriptures* have declared on this subject.

St. Paul says, that “through *Faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear<sup>t</sup>.” Here the very first doctrine which Natural Theology professes to inculcate, is spoken of as the result of *Faith*. And, in continuation of his subject, the Apostle adds, that “without Faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must *believe* that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him<sup>u</sup>:” implying, as it should seem, not that these fundamental doctrines are discoverable by the Light

<sup>t</sup> Heb. xi. 3.

<sup>u</sup> Verse 6.

of Nature ; but that they are to be received through Faith in God, by whom they were originally revealed.

St. Paul occasionally argues, indeed, from the visible works of Creation, and from the analogy between the natural and spiritual world, to shew, in opposition to Heathen Polytheism and Idolatry, the absurdity of not believing and worshipping the One True God. He reminds the people of Lystra, that God “left not himself without witness” even in the darkest times. In preaching to the Athenians, he infers from the works of Creation and Providence, that it was the duty of men to “seek the Lord, if haply they might “feel after him, and find him, though he be “not far from every one of us : for in him “we live, and move, and have our being<sup>y</sup>.” And again ; in his Epistle to the Romans, speaking of the Gentiles, he says, “that which “may be known of God is manifest in them ; “for God hath shewn it unto them. For “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being “understood by the things that are made, “even his eternal power and Godhead ; so “that they are without excuse : because that, “when they knew God, they glorified him

<sup>x</sup> Acts xiv. 17.

<sup>y</sup> Acts xvii. 27, 28.



“not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened<sup>z</sup>.”

But even from these passages, strong as they appear to be, it will be difficult to draw an argument in favour of the notion that man may arrive at the knowledge of God, without the light of Revelation. When we consider what St. Paul elsewhere says, that “the world by wisdom knew not God<sup>a</sup>,” and that “through Faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God<sup>b</sup>,” together with the incontrovertible fact, that the Heathen never did attain to any just notion of Him, as the Creator, Preserver, or Governor of the Universe; it seems more reasonable to understand the Apostle as maintaining only that the visible works of God bear such ample *testimony* to his Existence and Attributes as must render men inexcusable in not believing and obeying him, when these truths have been declared to them; and still more so in *changing* the truth of God into a lie, as the Heathen did, “and worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator.”

In like manner, St. Paul argues with the Corinthians on the natural and moral evi-

<sup>z</sup> Rom. i. 19, 20, 21.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. i. 21.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xi. 3.

dences of a Resurrection from the dead and a Future State, and charges those with *folly*<sup>c</sup>, who, with such testimonies in its favour, denied the credibility of the doctrine. Yet he elsewhere speaks of “life and immortality” as having been “*brought to light* through the “Gospel<sup>d</sup> ;” and frequently grounds the assurance of it on the *promises of God*. “I know,” saith he, “*in whom I have believed*<sup>e</sup> :”—and again, “he is faithful who hath *promised*<sup>f</sup>.”—The Patriarchs, and righteous men of old he declares to have walked by *faith*, in the expectation of a blessed Resurrection, according to God’s promises<sup>g</sup> ;—and he reminds Titus, that “the hope of Eternal Life had been “promised before the world began, and in “due times manifested through preaching<sup>h</sup>.”—St. Peter teaches the same thing. He exhorts suffering Christians to “commit their “souls to God as unto a *faithful* Creator<sup>i</sup> ;” and declares, that “according to his *promises*, “we look for a new heaven and a new earth, “wherein dwelleth righteousness<sup>k</sup>.” St. John also says, “This is the *promise* that *He* hath “*promised* us, even Eternal Life<sup>l</sup>.”

What St. Paul affirms, therefore, respecting

<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 36.

<sup>f</sup> Heb. x. 23.

<sup>i</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 19.

<sup>d</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.

<sup>g</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

<sup>k</sup> 2 Peter iii. 13.

<sup>e</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

<sup>h</sup> Titus i. 2, 3.

<sup>l</sup> 1 John ii. 25.

men's belief of God and of a Future State as primary Articles of Religion, is perfectly consistent with what is here contended for, the inability of man to discover them without some light from Revelation. There is nothing in his mode of expression which in any wise contravenes this position, or which tends to disprove that all the knowledge of these truths which is to be found amongst men has come down through the medium of written or traditional instruction, derived at first from Revelation. On the contrary, the most obvious interpretation of his meaning is, that men must have *Faith* to believe these doctrines, upon the testimony of God, by whom they were at first revealed; not that they must *reason* themselves into a belief of them by moral or metaphysical arguments.

It is indeed hardly possible to suppose that these Truths were *not* revealed to man, from the very beginning. For, can it reasonably be imagined that Adam was left (even in his primeval condition, when his faculties were unclouded by sin and corruption) to acquire the knowledge of his Creator from such proofs only as the light of Nature could afford him? or that he was suffered to remain in a state of uncertainty and conjecture respecting the continuance of his being, his

future destination, the purposes of his creation, the duties which he had to perform, the happiness provided for him, and the means of attaining it ? On all these points, so essential to his comfort and well-being, must we not almost necessarily conclude, that he derived instruction immediately from the Fountain of Wisdom ?

Equally improbable does it appear, that *after his Fall*, (when such an entire change had taken place in his views and expectations, when so much greater help was needful for him, and so much stronger assurance of the Divine favour towards him became requisite for his consolation and support,) he should be left to walk in darkness, or to trust to his own conjectural reasonings upon what had been *before* revealed to him. There is, indeed, sufficient evidence that fresh information was then vouchsafed to man, to shew him the way of duty and of happiness. The very first promise of a Redeemer is a proof that some communication instantly took place between his Creator and him, relative to his altered condition : and we may well suppose, (nay, we can hardly but suppose,) that, so far as could be conducive to his restoration to life and happiness, every thing was explicitly revealed which it behoved



him either to believe or to do, in order to his acceptance with God.

Here, then, we have an easy solution of the question, how the world became acquainted with the knowledge of God and of a Future State, without searching for it by abstract reasoning, that is, by reasoning from notions supposed to be inherent in the mind, or, indeed, from arguments of any kind independent of Divine communications.

From Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to the Jewish people, and from them to the rest of the world, these doctrines were handed down in succession, and occasionally confirmed, illustrated, or more largely unfolded, by subsequent Revelations. Through these Preachers of Righteousness, whom God from time to time raised up, the Gentiles (in addition to such imperfect traditions of the fundamentals of Religion, as must have been preserved even among the most corrupt descendants of Noah) received continual instruction and admonition, until the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage; after which period they were still oftentimes witnesses of tremendous signs and wonders, wrought for the purpose of overthrowing their idolatrous worship, and impressing them

with a belief and a dread of Jehovah, the God of Israel, who thus manifested himself in an especial manner as the true and only God, to the exclusion of all the imaginary Deities of the Heathen world.

Henceforward, the knowledge of Revealed Religion extended, by various means, far beyond those to whom it was directly communicated. Philosophers the most remote from the land of the Jews enjoyed opportunities, by their travels into Eastern countries, of enriching themselves with stores of religious truth from the fountain-head. The earlier and later dispersions of the Jews greatly contributed to the diffusion of this blessing: and to the Philosophers who immediately preceded the coming of Christ, the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures afforded a supply of information on Divine subjects, which evidently raised them above their predecessors, and gave a dignity and weight to their speculations not to be found in those of remoter ages. Thus, from the important epoch when God vouchsafed to become peculiarly and exclusively as it were the Deity of his people Israel, the rest of mankind were enabled through these various channels to collect many scattered fragments of Divine Knowledge, in addition to those general notions

which they had derived from their forefathers, respecting the great fundamental principles of Theology and Morals.

Further evidence than this the perverseness of man was not entitled to expect; nor could this, if duly improved, have failed to secure him against gross and dangerous error. For, the truths thus transmitted by tradition, or obtained by intercourse with the favoured people of God, though not discoverable by the light of Nature, are, when revealed, so congenial with the feelings, and so consonant with the reason, of mankind, that to lose the knowledge of them, or wilfully to renounce them, argues an unpardonable degree of neglect or depravity. Yet of such depravity or neglect the Gentile world, with all its boasted wisdom and virtue, appears to have been guilty. "That which may be known of God," the Apostle says, "was manifest in them; for God had *shewed* it "unto them<sup>n</sup>;" that is, he had originally taught it them by Revelation. They were "without excuse<sup>o</sup>," therefore, not for their inability to *find out* this knowledge; but for not *retaining* it, *not liking to retain it*<sup>p</sup>," as the same Apostle says, after it had been made known to them. They *apostatized* from the truth; or, if they retained any portion of it,

<sup>n</sup> Rom. i. 19.

<sup>o</sup> Verse 20.

<sup>p</sup> Verse 28.

(since to lose it entirely was scarcely possible,) they “held it in unrighteousness,” defaced it by many corruptions in principle, and still more in practice; gave themselves up to vile affections, to Idolatry, Polytheism, or profane ridicule of the most awful truths of Religion:—and all this, not so much from *ignorance*, as from *self-will*; in punishment of which, God “gave them up to a reprobate “mind, to work those things which are not “convenient<sup>q</sup>.”—Such is the Scriptural account of the matter; and we may safely challenge the Infidel to frame one that is more probable and consistent.

What has here been said respecting that knowledge of God, and of a Future State, which some have supposed men to be capable of acquiring without the help of Revelation, may also be applied to that sense of *Moral Obligation* which, according to many, is inherent in the human mind, and is thought to furnish evidence of the ability of man to frame an acceptable Religion, without any other guide than the Light of Nature.

St. Paul says, that “when the Gentiles, “which have not the Law, do by nature the “things contained in the law, these, having “not the law, are a law unto themselves:

<sup>q</sup> Rom. i. 28.



“ which shew the work of the law written in  
“ their hearts, their conscience also bearing  
“ witness, and their thoughts the mean while  
“ accusing or else excusing one another<sup>r</sup>. ”—  
This text has often been brought to support  
the opinion of the sufficiency of Natural Religion as a rule of conduct. But, without  
entering into refined or doubtful criticisms  
on the text itself; it is to be observed, that,  
with regard to the knowledge of moral duties,  
the Heathen appear to have stood in the  
same predicament as they did with respect to  
the knowledge of God. Man’s religious and  
moral duties were, no doubt, *revealed* to him  
from the beginning, and handed down to  
succeeding generations; from whose minds  
they could never be entirely obliterated, how-  
ever obscured and defaced. The precepts of  
*Noah* have generally been considered by  
learned men, and especially by the Jewish  
writers, as forming the basis of every moral  
code promulgated in the Gentile world: and  
hence we may easily account for the noble  
sentiments of morality which occur in Hea-  
then writers, as we have already accounted  
for their sublime and sometimes just specula-  
tions on the Divine nature and perfections.  
In this sense the Gentiles were undoubtedly

<sup>r</sup> Rom. ii. 14, 15.

“a law unto themselves.” They had certain general principles of moral duty transmitted to them from the Patriarchs, occasionally confirmed and illustrated by subsequent intercourse with the chosen people of God, or by some acquaintance with the Sacred Writings: and though they were not in *Covenant* with God, nor were favoured, as the Jews were, with his especial presence and instruction, yet the partial knowledge of his laws thus impressed upon their minds by tradition and by education, so far operated on their conscience as to render them self-condemned or self-approved, according as they deviated from them, or conducted themselves conformably to their spirit and intention.

Thus it appears that neither Experience nor Scripture will warrant us in the supposition, that man has ever yet been able, by the mere light of Nature, to attain to a competent knowledge of Religious Truth. Let us now take a different view of the subject, and endeavour to shew, by arguments of another kind, how impossible it is for him to lay any *foundation* for such knowledge, other than that which is already laid in the revealed Will of God.

From a consideration of the powers and faculties of the human understanding it is

demonstrable, that it cannot attain to knowledge of any kind, *without some external communication*. It cannot *perceive*, unless an *impression* be made on the *organs* of perception:—it cannot form *ideas*, without *perceptions*:—it cannot *judge*, without a *comparison of ideas*:—it cannot form a *proposition*, without this exercise of its *judgment*:—it cannot *reason*, argue, or syllogize, without this previous formation of *propositions* to be examined and compared. Such is the procedure of the human understanding, in the work of ratiocination: whence it clearly follows, that it can in the first instance do nothing of itself; that is, it cannot *begin* its operations till it be supplied with materials to work upon, which materials must come *from without*; and that the mind, unfurnished with these, is incapable of attaining even to the lowest degree of knowledge.

The first question, therefore, is, what are the *inlets* of knowledge; what the channels through which the mind is to be supplied with these necessary means of information? —Logicians speak of these as various; namely, sense, consciousness, intelligence, reason, faith, and inspiration. But all these seem reducible to the two general heads of *sense* and *inspiration*; since either from the one or the

other of these every species of knowledge must be ultimately derived. For, abstract reasoning without *ideas* is impossible; and unless we suppose ideas to be *innate*, (which, from the most accurate observation, is proved to be contrary to *fact*,) we shall find it difficult to assign any definite meaning to consciousness, intelligence, reason, or faith, if entirely unconnected with sense or inspiration.

To which of these, then, to *sense* or *inspiration*, (or, in other words, to man's faculties instructed by what the visible world presents to his view, or by what God may be pleased to reveal to him,) can we most reasonably ascribe his knowledge of the Divine Nature and Attributes, of a Future State, and of Moral Good and Evil?

Satisfactorily to demonstrate the Divine Nature and Attributes, or even the existence of God, by arguments *à priori*, appears (if we may judge from what has hitherto been attempted by the ablest metaphysical writers) to be beyond the reach of man. If, therefore, these can be proved at all, without Revelation, it must be by reasoning *à posteriori*, or induction from the phenomena of the natural world. But we may venture to affirm that even in *this* mode of investigation, however plain and convincing the arguments



derived from it may appear to *us* who are already in possession of the truth, man would not have attained to any firm and settled conviction upon these points, had God never vouchsafed to manifest himself by proofs of a more direct and irresistible kind.

Between matter and spirit, things visible and invisible, time and eternity, beings finite and beings infinite, objects of sense and objects of faith, the connection is not perceptible to human observation. Though we push our researches therefore, to the extreme point whither the light of Nature can carry us, they will, in the end, be abruptly terminated; and we must stop short, at an immeasurable chasm between the creature and the Creator. As soon, indeed, as the Creator is *shewn* to us, that is, as soon as we are *taught* that there is a Creator necessarily existent, and of infinite perfections, our understandings readily admit the idea of such a Being, and we find in the natural world innumerable *testimonies* to the truth of the doctrine. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his “handy work:” and we should be “without “excuse,” did we not acknowledge that he hath “never left himself without witness,” and that “in him we live, and move, and

“ have our being ;” or did we not, under the influence of such an impression, “ glorify him “ as God.” But these testimonies, though evidently designed to corroborate the truth, and to preserve it from being disregarded or forgotten, do not appear to be the *source* from whence the first knowledge of it was derived. For *this* we are compelled to search elsewhere. And since there is no proof that men ever *did* arrive at this knowledge without some previous *instruction*, or that it *can* be acquired merely by observation on the natural and visible world ; what conclusion appears so rational and satisfactory, as that it was from the beginning communicated to man by the Creator himself ?

Let it not, however, be surmised, that in these arguments respecting the inability of man to discover by the light of Nature the Attributes or even the Existence of God, there is any thing which can furnish *Atheism* with the shadow of an apology. Nothing can be more irrational, nothing betrays greater stupidity or perverseness, than to embrace Atheism, after the idea of a God has been once communicated to the mind. Only propose this truth to the understanding, (accompanied with those almost irresistible arguments in confirmation of it which

may be deduced from every object around us,) and it must gain instant admission, unless the heart be so hardened and the eyes so blinded, that we can neither see nor understand. Still it may be no less certain that this is a truth *originally made known by Revelation*, not discovered by the light of Nature; and that they to whom it has never been *communicated* can never acquire it.

If, therefore, we were employed in endeavouring to convert an Atheist, who, as such, would doubtless be indisposed to receive this truth on the ground of *authority* only, we must necessarily refer him to those *testimonies* which the natural and moral phenomena of the world abundantly supply, of a Creator all-wise, powerful, and good; and thence shew the extreme absurdity of disbelieving the existence of such a Being. These testimonies are so powerful and convincing as to render any man inexcusable in refusing to admit the notion of a God, when thus presented to him, unless he be incurably defective in his understanding. But if he were further to inquire, “How came you by  
“ this idea, or how came mankind in general  
“ to have it? did you, or they, discover it of  
“ yourselves? or were you taught it by  
“ others?”—the obvious answer would be,—

We were not left to ourselves to find it out;— we have all been *taught* it by our *forefathers*; —and our forefathers were taught it of God: —but as soon as we were thus made acquainted with it, we found it so strongly *confirmed* by every thing which the visible world presents to our view, that we required no additional evidence, nor any further Revelation to declare it. After such an explanation, what excuse could Atheism allege? or what cause would it have to triumph in the acknowledgment that the Existence and Attributes of God are not to be discovered by the Light of Nature alone?

Having thus endeavoured to shew, that even a knowledge of the Being and Attributes of God must have been originally derived from Revelation, it seems hardly necessary to enter into a discussion of other points subordinate to those, in order to prove that an acquaintance with *them* likewise is to be traced to the same primary source.

The natural and moral Evidences of a *Future State* have been allowed by most inquirers, and especially by the *ancient* Philosophers, (who may be considered as the most impartial and the most competent judges of the question,) to fall far short of demonstration, and to afford at best but unsolid



and unsatisfactory grounds of expectation. From the natural and moral world, may, indeed, be brought innumerable *illustrations* and *attestations* of this momentous Truth, as well as of the Being and Perfection of the Creator; sufficient, in the one case as in the other, to obtain for the doctrine a ready admission into the human mind, and to preserve it, when made known, from ever being entirely effaced. But as *demonstrations* of the doctrine, without some declaratory and authoritative assurance from the Author of our being, we cannot but think that, as they have ever hitherto been, so they ever will be found inadequate.—Nature, in both instances, (if we may apply to this subject what the Evangelist says in comparing the Baptist with our Blessed Saviour<sup>s</sup>), “*is not that light*” which can shew us the doctrine itself, but only “bears “*witness* to that light,” either as its precursor to prepare men for its reception, when it has been for a while almost extinguished and forgotten, or as its concomitant and attendant to awaken their attention to it, and to prevent them from beholding it with indifference or neglect.

The attempt to frame systems of *Moral*

<sup>s</sup> John i. 8.

*Duty* without reference to the *revealed* Will of God, is attended with little better success. The beneficial effects produced by a strict regard to sobriety, justice, and holiness are, indeed, so conspicuous, that when these duties are pointed out to us we immediately discern their utility and importance. But that a perception of the advantages resulting from them is not sufficient of itself to secure their performance, or to bring men to an agreement as to their nature and obligation, is apparent from the infinite diversity and discordance of the several systems which have been framed by speculative men, and especially from the acknowledged imperfection of those which governed the practice of the Heathen world. Here, as in the other instances, *Revelation* is necessary to “shew what is good,” to declare it authoritatively, and to give it the sanction of a Lawgiver from whom there can be no appeal. All that the moral sense within ourselves, or our observation on the effects produced by it on others, can do, is to give *testimony* to the excellence of the Law and to the perfections of its Divine Author, and to make us ever *mindful* of its obligation; “our *conscience*” (as St. Paul expresses it) “*bearing witness*, and our thoughts accusing

“or excusing one another,” according to our violation or observance of the Divine commands.

Moreover, the obligation of Moral Duty, as well as the certainty of a Future State, depends upon another grand point, *the Immortality of the Soul*; which baffles all our researches by the light of Nature only, and may justly be reckoned among the *incognita* of human Reason, till declared on the authority of Revelation. If the Soul be *not* immortal, and, consequently, there be no Future State of Rewards and Punishments, inquiries into rules of Moral Duty become comparatively of little importance. If there *be* such a State, then comes the anxious question, “what we must do, to inherit Eternal Life?”—a question, which none but the Creator himself can resolve.

But with respect to all these doctrines, the Being and Nature of God, the Immortality of the Soul, a Future State of rewards and punishments, and the obligation of Moral Duty, it may be observed, that they who have been instructed in them from their infancy are so accustomed to consider them as natural and necessary truths, that they are little aware in what manner the knowledge of them has been first acquired. They suppose

them to be deductions from natural principles, or discoveries of human Reason; because they are in all respects so congenial with our hopes and wishes, and are so strongly attested by every thing which passes under our contemplation in the natural and moral world, that they cannot be relinquished without doing violence to the feelings and to the understanding. Yet nothing is more certain than that Philosophers of old never arrived at a *knowledge* of these truths, never attained to a *conviction* of any one of them: nor is there, perhaps, at this day, a savage nation on the globe which can properly be said to know or to believe them. Glimmerings of light and information there have always been; enough to excite the hopes, and fears, and wishes of mankind, but not enough to confirm their expectations.

Thus it appears that they who reject Revelation have no solid *foundation* to build upon; even though we should allow Reason to be in a far more perfect state than that in which it actually is. But never is it to be forgotten that Reason is now corrupt and vitiated, and therefore much less capable of performing its functions than has hitherto, for argument's sake, been supposed. Since the Fall of man, "the whole head is sick,



“and the whole heart faint<sup>t</sup>:” and if, according to the Heathen Sage, to “know ourselves” be a fundamental maxim of wisdom, how much does it behove us to know and consider this our imperfect state, before we presume to speculate upon religious truths? St. Paul, reflecting on the nature of fallen man and the conflict within him between good and evil, and that there “is a law in the members, “warring against the law of the mind,” exclaims, “O wretched man that I am! who “shall deliver me from the body of this “death?” How, indeed, can such a nature as this be expected to frame a sufficient law unto itself, or to devise a Religion acceptable in the sight of God? Or, supposing this great task accomplished, how shall man, thus distracted by opposite propensities, *perform* what is required of him? Where are the helps for human infirmity and the remedies for human corruption? or what assurance has he that God will not exact the full performance of all that man *knows* to be his duty? On what ground will he claim *reward* even for his best services? Much more, how will he *atone* for his past offences? how will he satisfy the just indignation of God, or stand before the judgment-seat, and look with confidence for

<sup>t</sup> Isa. i. 5.

<sup>u</sup> Rom. vii. 23, 24.

pardon and acceptance? To these questions one answer alone can be returned;—that they relate to points, which, however deeply and awfully interesting to mankind, depend exclusively on the Will of GOD, and can only be made known by *Him*, or by those to whom *He* hath revealed them.

If, then, no system can be well-founded or worthy of acceptance, which rests on unwarrantable hypotheses or uncertain premises, and which is not applicable to the purpose for which it is intended; need we hesitate to affirm of Natural Religion, as contradistinguished from Revealed, that it is destitute of solid foundations, and wholly unsuitable to the condition of man? Even as to its primary and most important doctrines it is fluctuating in its principles, and has no other support than conjecture or opinion. It is also inapplicable to its intended purpose; because it regards us not as *fallen* creatures. It makes no provision for our wants and infirmities, provides no remedy for our corruptions, offers no atonement for our offences, has no Redeemer, no Sanctifier, no means of grace, no covenanted terms of acceptance.

It seems impossible, indeed, to suppose, that on any of the fundamental articles of Religion, man should be able, *of himself*, to

obtain satisfactory information, unless we admit the doctrine of *innate* ideas, and believe that such truths are by nature indelibly stamped upon our minds. But this would involve us in fresh difficulties. For, how shall we then account for the acknowledged ignorance of mankind respecting these truths, where Revealed Religion is lost or defaced? or how is it that any difference of opinion concerning them should ever have subsisted among men, except such as may be accounted for from the comparative strength or weakness of their intellects? If the knowledge of the True God, of the immortality of the soul and a future state, and of the eternal and immutable distinction between moral good and evil be *innate ideas*, how happens it that opinions so wide of the truth, and so contradictory to each other, respecting *all* these points, have prevailed not only among individuals, but among whole communities and nations? On the supposition of these instinctive notions of Religion and Virtue, it should seem that Education as well as Revelation were almost superfluous; that the Savage might have as clear a perception of Divine Truths as the most enlightened Philosopher; and that the Philosopher would be as firmly persuaded of them as the Chris-

tian. But is this the case? was it ever the case? or will any Deist, notwithstanding his reluctance to acknowledge the necessity of Revelation, have the hardiness to answer in the affirmative?

The sum of what has been advanced, is this.—Man was, from the beginning, endued with intellectual powers, capable of receiving and understanding Religious Truths. But these Truths being neither discernible by the Senses, nor innate in the mind, could only be communicated by Divine Instruction. It is, therefore, necessarily to be supposed, that God *revealed* them to our first Parents; to the intent, (as the Psalmist says, respecting the dealings of Jehovah with his people Israel,) “that the generations to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to *their* children; that they might set their hope in God<sup>y</sup>.” The preservation of these doctrines, in their pure and genuine state, would depend on the care and attention of mankind, or on such additional Revelations as the Almighty might be pleased to make. After the Fall, other truths concerning man’s Redemption were also revealed, to be transmitted in like manner to posterity, and per-

<sup>y</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 6, 7.



petuated by such means as God should see fit to provide. These, however, as well as the former truths, were in process of time, through the folly and perverseness of man, miserably corrupted and obscured; though to lose them *entirely* was scarcely possible. Moreover, God vouchsafed, “at sundry times and in divers “manners,” to manifest himself to mankind by such acts of power and goodness as could not but forcibly remind them of his Being and Attributes, and of their dependence on Him for life and salvation. Hence, even in the worst of times, Divine Knowledge was never wholly extinct; and men were inexcusable in disregarding the testimonies which the natural and moral world presented to their view, of the certainty of those fundamental doctrines in which they had been originally instructed. Still, however, their total inability to find out these doctrines by any other light than that of Revelation, was only rendered more conspicuous by their continual aberrations from the Truth, and by their increased depravity and ignorance, as they receded farther and farther from the Fountain of heavenly Wisdom.

Such is the general purport of the arguments which have been brought to prove that there is no solid *foundation* for any

knowledge of Divine Truth, except the Revelation which God hath been pleased to make. Other important considerations might be urged to the same effect; particularly that of the *origin of language*, which appears to afford almost a decisive proof that man must have been originally favoured with immediate instruction from his Creator. But a discussion of this subject would lead us into a wider range than our present limits will admit. We might also shew that no *counterfeit* Revelation, no work of Imposture or Enthusiasm, hath any such basis to rest upon as the Religion for which we contend. But this will more properly be considered, when we come to compare the *evidences* of false Religions with those of the True One.

At present it has been our sole endeavour, to prove that *some* Revelation is absolutely necessary to instruct mankind in the knowledge of Divine Truths. If the arguments to this effect be valid, the Infidel is deprived of his first strong hold, that of the supposed ability of Man to frame his own Religion: and we may apply to him, what St. Paul, in the Text, applies to preachers of heresy and false doctrine, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We may also see abundant cause to be thankful

that such a foundation *is* laid ; on which, as on a Rock, we may build our everlasting hope, which neither the rains, nor the winds, nor the tempests, shall be able to overthrow, but which shall stand unshaken, from generation to generation.

## SERMON XV.

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1 COR. iii. 19.

*The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God*

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HOWEVER plain and incontrovertible may be the arguments which we bring, to prove the necessity of Revelation ; we shall always find it a matter of difficulty to convince those who attach themselves to “the wisdom of this world,” that we have Truth on our side. The votaries of Philosophy will hardly suffer us to question the sufficiency of their natural faculties to instruct them upon every subject, Divine as well as human ; and the advocate for Natural Religion will be ready to enter his protest against any thing that seems to derogate from the dignity of human nature. “Reason,” it will still be said, “is the gift of God, and ought to be prized above all other gifts ; it ought on every occasion to be consulted, and its suggestions implicitly obeyed ;



“since otherwise we degrade ourselves to  
“the rank of brutes, and insult the Creator  
“by depreciating the noblest work of his  
“hands.”

This kind of language will never fail to gain attention and applause. But when the point which we have hitherto maintained, (that of the inability of man to frame a Religion for himself,) is clearly understood and fairly represented, it will not be found to depreciate any *just* pretensions of the human understanding. For, what real disparagement to its faculties can it be, to say that man must be “taught of God,” before he can have any knowledge of Divine Truths? Or how can Reason be more nobly or usefully employed, than in receiving instruction from Him who is the Fountain of Wisdom, and in deducing from what He is pleased to reveal truths of the highest importance? Who gave us reason and understanding? Who furnished us with a capacity of apprehending truths of any kind? Who, but God himself? “Now” (as St. Paul argued respecting the gifts of the Holy Spirit) “if thou didst *receive*” this capacity, “why dost thou glory, “as if thou hadst not received it<sup>a</sup>?” To what purpose, indeed, are our rational facul-

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ties bestowed, unless they be supplied with the necessary means of attaining spiritual as well as natural knowledge? And whence can these be derived but from “the Father of Spirits?”

Shall we, then, deny to God the exclusive right of imparting to us this knowledge, in such way as he may think fit? or shall we call in question His power to communicate it, in one way rather than in another? He that “made the eye, shall He not see<sup>b</sup>?”—and He that gave man *Reason, the eye of the mind*, shall He not enlighten and instruct it, as seemeth to Him best? The *bodily* eye is capable of perceiving *natural* objects, and of thereby conveying to the mind a continual accession of ideas: but how could it perform this office, unless there were *light* to render these objects visible? The *mental* eye, in like manner, is capable of discerning *spiritual* truths: but to what purpose would it possess this faculty, unless these truths were rendered discernible, by a sufficiency of light to bring them to its view; and whence can that light issue, but from the source of spiritual illumination? In both cases, the natural objects and the spiritual truths have, indeed, their existence, independently of our

<sup>b</sup> Ps. xciv. 9.

perception of them : but except so far as the natural light in the one case, and the light of Revelation in the other, is cast upon them, they are, to us, as if they did not exist. As well, therefore, might we affirm that the Eye can see in darkness, as that Reason can discover spiritual truths without the light of Revelation.

If these considerations do not appear convincing to those who maintain the all-sufficiency of men's natural Reason, it is, perhaps, in vain, to hope for a more favourable reception of the Apostle's assertion in the Text, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." By this wisdom is to be understood the *Philosophy* of the ancient Heathen ; that wisdom, which was the result of the most diligent and painful researches of the human mind, during the long period of darkness in the Gentile world, from the Patriarchal Ages to the coming of Christ ? and which, notwithstanding the vain boastings of its professors, is here declared to be foolishness "with God."—To a *Christian*, it might be supposed, this declaration must be decisive : but with an *Infidel*, the bare assertion even of an inspired Apostle can hardly be expected to have weight. That we may not, therefore, seem abruptly to repel

the advocate for Reason and Natural Religion, let us again join issue with him ; and farther examine the claims of that earthly wisdom, or Philosophy, which is so ready to take offence at any attempt to lessen its importance.

It is not Reason itself, but the abuse of Reason, which, under the denomination of the wisdom of this world, the Apostle here speaks of in such contemptuous terms. Reason, rightly applied, will teach men modesty and humility ; nothing being more *irrational* than pride and self-sufficiency. It is, therefore, the misapplication of Reason to subjects beyond its proper sphere, that is here stigmatized as “foolishness with God.” It is “the wisdom of *this world*,” as contradistinguished from, or set in opposition to Divine wisdom ; which, far from being rational and worthy of honour, is but vain and presumptuous folly.

That Reason itself is the gift of God, it were ungrateful and impious to deny. It is a spark of the Divine Intellect, communicated to man at his creation, and transmitted to his posterity from generation to generation. We cannot be too thankful for this precious gift, by which we are raised above the brute creatures, and are made capable

of receiving all the knowledge that can be imparted to us, whether natural or spiritual. That it is bestowed upon us for our general guidance, and to be our constant defence against error and delusion; and that it ought, therefore, to be diligently cultivated and improved; none can doubt, who possess it and understand its value.

But to infer from hence, that human Reason is to be the measure and standard of Divine Truth, and that it supersedes the necessity of Revelation, is a sophism the most egregious. Can Reason exalt men to the rank of angels, and to an equality with God? Can it penetrate the secrets of the natural, much more of the spiritual world? Can it traverse the Universe? compass Omnipotence? explore Omniscience? calculate Infinity? measure Immensity? grasp Eternity? Can it see things invisible? hear things ineffable? discern the world of Spirits? and scan the counsels of the Most High? Yet all this must it be able to perform before it can, by dint of its own natural powers, attain to such an acquaintance with God and with spiritual truths as Revelation professes to make known, and which (if Revelation be true) it absolutely behoves us to act upon as well as to believe. If,



then, the vainest of Philosophical Enthusiasts will scarcely pretend to such vast powers of Intellect as these, but must be compelled to say with the Psalmist, "Such knowledge "is too wonderful and excellent for me, I "cannot attain unto it<sup>c</sup>;"—have we not, without further inquiry, sufficient grounds to insist, with the Apostle, that "the wisdom "of this world," when it presumes to fathom the depths of Divine truth with its own scanty line of knowledge, must be "foolishness with God?"

But it is the error of those who contend that all necessary Truth is discoverable or demonstrable by Reason, that they affirm of *human* reason in *particular*, what is only true of Reason *in general*, or of Reason in the abstract. To say that whatever is true must be either discoverable or demonstrable by Reason, can only be affirmed of an *all-perfect* Reason; and is, therefore, predicable of none but the *Divine* Intellect. So that unless it can be shewn that *human* Reason is the same, in degree as well as in kind, with *Divine* Reason; that is, is commensurate with it as to its powers, and equally incapable of error; the inference, from Reason in the abstract to *human* Reason, is manifestly in-

<sup>c</sup> Psalm cxxxix. 5.

conclusive. Nothing more is necessary, to shew the fallacy of this mode of arguing, than to urge the indisputable truth, that God is wiser than Man, and has endued man with only a *portion* of that faculty, which He himself, and none other besides Him, possesses in absolute perfection.

But, to bring the main question to a stricter scrutiny, let us take a more particular view of the two great branches of human Science, Natural and Moral Philosophy, so far as they are connected with Religious Truth.

They who oppose the authority of Revelation, and argue for the sufficiency of man's natural Reason to guide him into all necessary truth, are fond of insisting upon modern discoveries and improvements in the various branches of Natural Philosophy, as affording proof of the gradual progress of the human mind towards perfection in *every* branch of knowledge, spiritual as well as natural. To shew the fallacy of such reasoning, it is necessary to examine the *boundaries* of Natural Philosophy; to ascertain its principles and its object; to know where it begins, and where it ends: since it is much to be apprehended, that, in arguments of this kind, great mistakes arise from confounding things natu-

ral with things spiritual, and from applying the principles of one kind of knowledge to another which depends upon axioms and data of a totally different description.

To prove this, there is no need to enter into a discussion of the various systems of Physics, from the times of Thales and Pythagoras to the present day; nor to descant upon the favourite theories, which, at different periods, have most generally prevailed. Fashion, on this as on every other topic, has often given currency to opinions in one age, which in the next have been abandoned as ill-founded; and, for the most part, the *newest* Philosophy, whatever it might be, has been admired and vindicated as alone worthy of acceptance. The trouble, therefore, may well be spared, on this occasion, of developing the doctrine of the Oriental, Grecian, Roman, or Modern Schools. Sufficient will it be, to state briefly what has or has not been done by any of them, towards elucidating the *Divine* mode of operation even in the *natural* world; and to shew that nothing in the way of *natural* Philosophy can lead men to a knowledge of *spiritual* truths.

It has justly been observed of the *ancient* teachers of Physics, that “their Philosophy  
“ was so metamorphosed into Divinity, that

“ it is scarcely possible to separate the one “ from the other<sup>d</sup>.” In *their* writings, therefore, we shall have the clearest proof, how far Natural Philosophy will enable men to attain to Divine knowledge ; since, as to *moderns*, if they profess any belief in Revelation, they are usually careful to keep these subjects distinct and separate, as if aware that the study of Physics has nothing in common with the study of Theology.

That the ancients had clear and just conceptions of some fundamental truths in Physics ; that they were well acquainted with the general Mechanism of Nature ; and that in knowledge of this kind, the *earliest* writers were the most intelligent and correct ; are points which seem to be pretty clearly established by those who have given them diligent and impartial consideration. That their skill in the mechanical arts, in the mathematical sciences, and also in medical knowledge, was very considerable, has been no less satisfactorily proved. But in all their philosophical systems there appears to be one general and fundamental error, that of regarding the *powers* of Nature as the *Gods* of Nature ; or, in other words, considering the

<sup>d</sup> Jones.

merely *physical* or *instrumental* Agents of the Universe as endowed with *intellectual* energies, and to be revered as *Divinities*, or intelligent rulers of the world. This was one fruitful source of the Gentile Polytheism and Idolatry ; and the only modification of this principle which seems to bring it nearer to a rational notion of a Supreme Being, (and which has accordingly led some of the learned to contend for their supposed knowledge of the Divine Unity,) is their imaginary doctrine of the *Anima Mundi*, or intelligent Spirit pervading the Universe and giving life and activity to the whole. This, however, proved no check to Polytheism ; because the subordinate powers of Nature were still held to be fit objects of worship, however dependent upon this Universal Agent. Moreover, if the doctrine of the *Anima Mundi* be thoroughly scrutinized, it will perhaps be found to mean nothing more, than that there is a subtle and imperceptible, yet *material* principle, possessed of an inherent self-activity, by which it becomes the originating cause of activity in all other bodies ; or, at most, that it is the parent mass of intellect or spirit, whence all other intellects or spirits emanate, (as of *physical necessity*, not by any act of volition,) and into which they are all ultimately



resolved. But in neither of these senses, nor in any other whereby it can consistently be explained, does it convey any notion correspondent with that of a Deity endued with moral and intellectual perfections.

That the greatest and wisest philosophers, from Thales and Pythagoras to Plato, including the several Sects into which the Ionic and Italic Philosophy were divided, taught no doctrine more nearly approaching to Theological Truth than this, may, perhaps, be safely affirmed. That Aristotle, though he differed considerably from his teachers on these points, wandered still farther from the truth, will hardly be denied in the present times, however he may have been formerly held up to extravagant veneration, by his bigoted adherents. Perhaps, indeed, the implicit deference which, for a long series of ages, was paid to his Philosophy, best accounts for the many gross errors on theological subjects, which prevailed throughout Christendom till the Protestant Reformation. And although in later times that homage has ceased to be paid to the name of Aristotle, and the philosophical world has long since asserted its liberty to range, uncontrolled by authority, through all the regions of philosophy; yet it is by no means to be admitted,

that the discoveries or improvements of modern inquiries have added any thing of solid information to our *Theological* knowledge; neither has it been proved, that any proficiency in the study of Physics is *capable* of leading us to a knowledge of Divine or spiritual truths.

Happy indeed were it, if even *Christian* Philosophers had not, in some instances, given occasion to the enemies of our Faith to blaspheme, and to turn the artillery of Physics, as well as of Metaphysics, against Divine Revelation. With these, however, we have at present no concern. It is sufficient for our purpose to shew, that Philosophy, in whatever hands it may be placed, never can instruct us in Theology, nor make us “wise unto salvation.”

If the Mechanism of Nature, or those powers by which its operations are carried on, be better understood now than formerly; it is chiefly because the investigation of it has been facilitated by an improvement in the instruments necessary for experimental observation; by the help of which, some important natural phenomena have been discovered, which were before unobserved. For it is the distinguishing and honourable characteristic of Natural Philosophy (since Bacon led the

way in fixing its principles) that it has rejected as unsafe, and leading only to visionary speculations, all reasoning *à priori* respecting the subjects of which it treats, and admits nothing as matter of Science, which is not susceptible of *experimental* proof. Still, however, its *limits*, as a Science, are precisely the same as heretofore ; because the *objects* on which it is employed are the same as they ever were, and ever must be. Beyond the *instrumental* Agents of the natural world it cannot possibly extend its observations. On these its exclusive attention is employed : and the only deduction which it can make from them, conducive to religious knowledge, is, that there must be a Supreme intelligent Author, Disposer, and Superintendant of that stupendous machinery which is presented to its contemplation. Farther than this, with respect to the discovery of Divine Truth, the Philosophy of Nature cannot possibly advance : and even thus far it never *did* go in ancient times ; nor, probably, ever *would* have gone without the aid of Revelation.

To argue, therefore, (as too many are inclined to do,) from modern discoveries in Chemistry, Pneumatics, Electricity, or the like, that human knowledge in general, is not only progressive but *unlimited*, is unwarrant-

able and presumptuous. Still more so is it, to infer that our improvement in *spiritual* attainments will necessarily keep pace with our advancement in experimental Philosophy; since the study of *Physics* has nothing in common with *Theology*, properly so called, either as to its *principles*, or the *subjects* on which it is employed, or the *end* which it proposes. In *Physics*, our actual observation cannot extend beyond *second* causes, or the instrumental agents of the *material* world. The *First Cause* will still be as remote as ever from our view; and the *immaterial* world will still elude our researches. What avails it, then, to boast of the inventions of the Telescope, the Microscope, the Air-Pump, and the like? Greatly as the progress of *human Arts* and *Sciences* may have been promoted by these inventions; yet we are not one step nearer to *Divine* knowledge by any thing which they can do for us; nor at all better able by their means to “find out the All-mighty to perfection;” who still dwells in pavilions of darkness inaccessible to human sight. In short, Natural Philosophy being confined to sensible and material objects, cannot attain to even a glimpse of spiritual truth; and consequently is incapable, *per se*, of instructing men in what it most concerns

them to understand, the knowledge of God, or even of *Man*, so far as he is a spiritual and intellectual being.

The ancient philosophers bear testimony to the truth of this representation ; since most if not all of them appear to have stopped short of the Great First Cause of all things, and to have ascribed the operations of Nature to agents, which every one instructed in religious wisdom knows to be but instruments in the hand of God. Polytheism was the fruit of this false Philosophy. But Polytheism, proceeding from such principles, savours of *Atheism* ; since, in worshipping second causes, to the exclusion of the First, it gives to the creatures the honour due to the Creator, and virtually denies his Attributes, if not his Existence.

But, it may be said, it was not thus with later Philosophers, such as Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Des Cartes, or Leibnitz ; who, whatever difference of opinion there might be among them respecting the mode of operation by natural agents or secondary causes, all concurred in ascribing the *powers* with which these were endued to the supreme Author of Nature ; and were foremost to expose the absurdity of Atheistical tenets.—True :—but these were *Christians* : these were Believers



in *Revelation* ; and were not led by Philosophy only to an acknowledgment of the true God. *Their* suffrage is therefore to be placed to the account of Religion, rather than of Philosophy. By *Faith* they believed in God ; and their philosophical reasoning on his Being and Attributes was confined to its just province, that of illustrating his perfections by observations on the wonders of the natural world ; thus corroborating the truths which they had received from Revelation, by the testimony which the works of Creation bear to their Divine Author ; not attempting to ground those truths on the basis of human science.

Thus pursued, Natural Philosophy will always be found reconcilable with Religion, and even confirmatory of its truth. It is its proper office to solve the phenomena of Nature, upon principles which preserve inviolate the distinction between secondary causes and the First Cause ; reverently to explore the Mechanism of the universe ; and to regard all the material agents, (or, rather, instruments,) by which its operations are performed, as the productions of a Divine Artificer, who bestowed upon them such powers as they are endued with, and ordained them thus to act by physical laws, which cannot be

broken without His special permission. Philosophy oversteps not its just boundaries, in freely investigating the nature of those powers, and inquiring *how* they act in producing such Phenomena; these investigations being perfectly compatible with an acknowledgment of a Prime Efficient Cause, the Supreme Ruler and Governor, as well as Author, of all created being. It has, therefore, a most ample range of inquiry, and sources of experiment and speculation inexhaustible, without endangering men's religious faith. But from the moment it presumes to pass its prescribed limits, and would make natural phenomena the standard of spiritual and Divine Truth, it is out of its proper element. It then becomes "vain Philosophy," or "Philosophy falsely so called:" and, however it may be dignified and extolled as Wisdom by rash and inconsiderate *Man*, it is "*foolishness with God.*"

Let us now turn our thoughts to the pretensions of *Moral Philosophy*.

It is the observation of one<sup>e</sup> who had made the extent of the human faculties his peculiar study, that "Philosophy is as unable to give rules, as nature is to practise them." Various are the principles which have been

<sup>e</sup> Baker on Human Learning, chap. 6.

adopted as the basis of Morals, by ancient and modern theorists ; such as Utility, Expediency, the Fitness of things, the Beauty of Virtue, the Moral Sense or Conscience, Justice, Veracity, Public Good, and the like ; some of which differ from each other rather in name than in substance. But in every system which proposes to establish Morality on any other basis than that of the Revealed Will of God there is one fundamental defect, that no satisfactory account is given of *moral obligation*, properly so called. For supposing any of these theories to be sufficiently well-founded ; the question will still return, “ Why am I obliged to act thus ? ” — “ Why “ am I obliged to act in conformity with “ Truth, Utility, Fitness of things, or any “ other criterion which may be proposed, as “ the test of right and wrong ? ” To these questions no effectual answer can be given, but that it is *the Will of God* ; and that if we obey not *His* Will, we must abide the consequences, and suffer the penalties attached to disobedience. This is the *sanction*, the *only* sanction, which can strictly be said to *oblige* us to any particular rule of conduct : and this (as was before observed) must depend on the *declared* purpose of the Almighty, to reward or punish us, accord-

ing to our conformity or opposition to such rule.

The advocates, however, for the sufficiency of Natural Religion are not to be so easily repulsed. They will contend, in the first place, that this is admitting a very degrading principle of conduct; and that it is more consonant to the dignity of human nature, and to the equity of the Divine dealings with mankind, to suppose that Virtue is to be practised for Virtue's sake, and Vice to be abhorred for its intrinsic deformity; than that we should be led to shun the one, and to practise the other, from the *servile* dread of *punishment*, or the *mercenary* hope of *reward*. They will further contend, (if baffled in this argument,) that, even allowing the sanction of rewards and punishments to be the proper *motive*, and the authority of the Divine Will the proper *obligation*, of Moral Virtue; still the proof of Moral Duties from their expediency, Fitness, or the like, is, in effect, a proof of their *Divine Authority*; because God himself is necessarily guided by these considerations, and not by an arbitrary exercise of his Will. Nay, they will insist that there is an antecedent and eternal necessity for these principles of Moral Duty, independent of the

Will of the Creator; by which He himself is *bound* or *obliged* to act; and which, consequently, is to us a sufficient evidence of their authority, without reference to any declared communication of His Will.

It is exceedingly important to examine the foundations on which these opinions rest: and, perhaps, it may appear, that (notwithstanding the great authorities by which they are supported) they are sophistical and delusive.

First, as to the dignity of human nature, and the supposed unworthiness of acting on the belief of rewards and punishments, rather than on a philosophical admiration of the excellency of Virtue and an abhorrence of the turpitude of Vice; the whole dispute turns on this question; whether we be *independent* creatures, or not? Although we exalt ourselves to the utmost possible height in our own estimation; yet if we are really *dependent* on God, (which it may be presumed no true Deist will deny,) we only expose our littleness, as well as our presumption, in overlooking that dependence. Supposing also the certainty of a future state, how is it possible to separate the *obligations* of Morality from its *consequences*; or to satisfy ourselves and be at ease in our minds, merely from a con-



sciousness of having conformed to *our own* notions of rectitude, without reference to what God requires of us as the condition of obtaining his favour? This seems to be impossible, where a belief in a future state of retribution has taken firm hold upon the mind. Whatever, therefore, some philosophical declaimers may have advanced respecting the meanness and servility of looking to a “recompense of reward” for our actions; it is unnatural and irrational, *not* to act on such a principle: nay, it must be an offence to our Creator, not to “have respect unto “it;” unless it can be proved that God, when he had created man, left him to follow his own imaginations, and to seek for other motives and obligations to Virtue, than those of the fear and love of Him and of obedience to His commands.

To the argument of those who admit the *Will of God* as the proper basis of morality, but contend that His Will may be sufficiently ascertained (or, rather, can *only* be ascertained) by proving the Expediency, Fitness, or Beauty, of Virtue, because these considerations alone can be supposed to move the Author of our being to prescribe such conduct;—we may answer, that no proofs of this kind can be admitted as sufficiently

demonstrative of the Divine Will, or as constituting moral obligation in its strict and proper sense; because *obligation* implies the will of a *Superior*, which constrains us to obey or to suffer punishment. The most convincing arguments which can be brought, to shew the reasonableness, expediency, or excellence of whatever kind, attached to moral Virtue, do not touch the main point on which the present question depends, unless they establish at the same time its *Divine* authority.

Now, in order to establish this point, some of our most subtle Moralists (among whom are many who entertain great reverence for Revelation) argue thus: that there is an antecedent, eternal, and immutable fitness of things, or a necessary relation subsisting between them, which never can be effaced, and from a perception of which arise all our sentiments of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood: that a conformity with these sentiments in our principles and conduct constitutes moral rectitude, and our deviation from them moral obliquity; that there is a consciousness or moral sense within us, respecting these eternal truths, which is intended to be our sure guide in every thing that concerns us as accountable beings; and

that God himself has clearly manifested his approbation of Virtue and his disapprobation of Vice, by enduing us with such a moral sense of good and evil as is here described.

But how is this antecedent and eternal fitness of things to be considered as a certain criterion of moral obligation, or as superseding all other evidence of the Divine Will? Who made, or ordained it, but God himself? How, then, can it be regarded as *antecedent* to His Will? And if it be *not* antecedent to His Will, what evidence can the proof of such a fitness of things afford of moral right or wrong, *independent* of His Will? Are our perceptions or natural notions, of good and evil, (if such we have,) so certain and infallible as to raise us above the possibility of being further enlightened by Divine communications? If so, then human reason is the sole measure of Truth, and the Moral Sense an Instinct which will guide us unerringly; or, in other words, Man is a God unto himself, and needeth not to “give account of any of his matters;” nor can he be made wiser or better, except by the cultivation and improvement of his own natural faculties;—a position, which, however it may accord with the sentiments of the vain and superficial theo-

rists of the age, savours hardly less of ignorance than of impiety.

But, in order to gloss over this absurdity, it has been contended that these supposed eternal relations and fitnesses are as binding upon God himself, (with reverence be it spoken,) as they are upon his *creatures*; or, to speak in less offensive language, that because they are the *necessary* rule of *His* conduct, therefore He prescribes them as the rule of *ours*. This is a favourite topic with the Advocates of Natural Religion; with most of whom it seems to be the object, by every possible mode of argument, to prove that we are left to the guidance of *Nature*, and that God never interposes to instruct us in any other way. Some, however, whose attachment to the cause of Revealed Religion we cannot possibly call in question, urge the same doctrine. Thus, one of the profoundest Moralists and most sincere Christians of the last Century affirms, that “no commands  
“ whatsoever do make any thing morally good  
“ and evil, just and unjust, which *Nature* had  
“ not made such before<sup>f</sup>.”—But (with all due deference to so highly respectable an au-

<sup>f</sup> Dr. Cudworth's Treatise concerning Morality, p. 24.

thority) may we not be permitted to ask what is here meant by *Nature*? or in what sense Nature can possibly be understood as *antecedent* to the GOD of Nature? If the term Nature signify GOD himself, then, indeed, we readily grant that nothing is good or evil, just or unjust, true or false, which *He* hath not made such: but that seems to be the very thing which too many Moralists who have recourse to this argument labour to disprove. Again, says the same Author<sup>g</sup>, “the liberty of commanding is circumscribed within certain bounds and limits; so that if *any Commander* go beyond the sphere and bounds that Nature sets him, his commands will not oblige.”—The words “*any Commander*” seem intended to include the *Divine* Lawgiver himself, as well as *human* legislators. But is it possible that the Almighty can *go beyond the sphere of His Nature*? What is that Nature which can set bounds to *Him*? Or who will presume to say that any Divine command will not *oblige* us, in the fullest sense of moral obligation, although we may be altogether unable to discern its eternal relation and fitness? This indeed is a radical and insuperable objection to all theories of Morals, considered as inde-



pendent of the *revealed* Will of God, that they suppose us capable of *discerning* and fully *comprehending* those eternal fitnesses and relations, which, as they originated in the Will of the Creator and are subject to His Will, can only be fully known by HIM, and are discernible by *others* in such measure only as HE shall see fit to disclose them.

It should seem, however, that some have been led to adopt these theories, from a pious desire of removing from the Creator the imputation of caprice or arbitrary proceedings, by shewing that even He himself is bound by the same laws which bind His creatures, and that He cannot depart from them. But will not a just sentiment of reverence towards the Creator rather lead us to acquiesce in the general belief that whatever He wills must be consonant with rectitude and fitness, than to attempt to discover particular laws of rectitude and fitness anterior to his Will, and to regard Him as bound by them to such conduct as *we* deem befitting his Divine perfections? On what principle, indeed, can we admit the supposition of God's imposing laws upon mankind which may be repugnant to eternal rectitude? For, who made this eternal rectitude but God himself? What but His Will or-

dained to all creatures the course that they are to pursue? Where, then, is the necessity for seeking any *higher* obligation in Morals than the Will of Him who is the Author of that very Nature, which is thus set, as it were, in competition with its Creator, and regarded as of paramount obligation on Him, as well as on ourselves?

But farther, it deserves to be remarked, that as this relation or fitness of things can be neither antecedent to nor independent of the Divine Will: so neither is it, strictly speaking, *immutable*; since God may change it whenever he sees fit. He may change the relations that subsist between particular persons or things, and, consequently, may change the obligations and duties respecting them. The relation between Man and his Maker, as well as between Man and the inferior creatures, was changed on the *Fall* of Man. Considered with reference to the Redeemer, who was then first revealed to him, a great change took place in Man's moral obligations; insomuch that the several duties which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves, cannot now be fully and clearly ascertained, without previously knowing in what relation we stand to our Redeemer and Sanctifier, as well as to our Creator. Thus

much must be acknowledged by every *Believer* of the Gospel: and the *Unbeliever* cannot prove the contrary, unless he be able to demonstrate *à priori* that Man is not in a fallen state, and that there is no Redeemer or Sanctifier, to whom he owes any moral obligation.

To these considerations may also be added, (as, perhaps, decisive of the question,) that unless it can be proved that God has impressed upon us *innate ideas* of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong, it will be to no purpose to contend for a rule of conduct which no human intellect can possibly discover or demonstrate purely by its own *natural* powers, for want of axioms or data on which to ground its propositions. Unless, therefore, we consider *Divine Instruction* as the basis of all our knowledge in *moral* truths as well as in truths *Divine*, (with which moral truths are indeed inseparably connected,) we shall never be able to frame a theory of Ethics free from innumerable objections.

Here again, as in the former instance, we might make our appeal to ancient times for testimony of the defectiveness of all moral systems framed without a competent knowledge of the Will of God. The manifold imperfections of the purest systems of Heathen

Ethics, as well as the doubts and disagreements of the ablest teachers of Moral Philosophy before the promulgation of Christianity, fully confirm all that has been advanced on this subject, and shew the utter insufficiency of the Light of Nature as a guide to moral perfection.

Thus far have we proceeded, in endeavouring to prove that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God,” whenever it affects to be independent of Him, or to frame religious systems without a knowledge of His revealed Will. If the arguments brought to establish this position be valid, we are enabled to give a decisive answer to all those objections against Revealed Religion which proceed on the supposition of the competency of human Reason to guide us to a knowledge of those truths on which depends our happiness as beings destined to life and immortality: and of such a nature, perhaps, are all the objections which have been adduced from reasoning *à priori* against the Christian Revelation. To those who are content that we should die like the brutes that perish, it may seem sufficient to attain to no more knowledge on spiritual subjects than brutes themselves can reach. With *them*, nothing will be deemed important

which looks beyond the present world. But such is not the hope of a rational creature ; nor will it be the *end* of any human being, whatever may be the persuasion of perverse and incredulous men. For something else, therefore, it behoves us to provide : and if Reason, unenlightened by Revelation, be unable to carry us beyond the dreary scene of mortality, what remains but that we lift up our eyes to Him “who dwelleth in the “heavens,” and gratefully receive whatever communications He may vouchsafe to make to us? While we “lean upon our own understandings,” and search for Divine Truths only by the help of human science, “we “wait for light, but behold obscurity ; for “brightness, but we walk in darkness ; we “look for judgment, but there is none ; for “salvation, but it is far from us<sup>g</sup>.”—Blessed be God ! then, that we are not left to ourselves, nor to the feeble aid which our own natural faculties can supply ; but that “the “dayspring from on high hath visited us, “to give light to them that sit in darkness “and in the shadow of death, and to guide “our feet into the way of peace<sup>h</sup> !”

<sup>g</sup> Isaiah lix. 9, 11.

<sup>h</sup> Luke i. 78, 79.



## SERMON XVI.

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2 COR. v. 7.

*We walk by faith, not by sight.*

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ST. PAUL here lays down the principle which distinguishes the Christian from the Philosopher, or mere man of Reason. The wisdom of this world being conversant with worldly objects only, is derived through the medium of the senses; and all the information which man can acquire by the mere exercise of his natural powers is confined to the transitory concerns of this present life. The wisdom of the Christian is of a higher cast. It is conversant with the world of spirits: and by it man aspires to a knowledge of God and a future state, of the human soul, of good and evil, of every thing which relates to his spiritual and eternal interests.

If we inquire, how it comes to pass that the studies and the attainments of the Christian are thus superior to those of the Philo-

sopher ; the answer is, that the former walks by *Faith*, the latter by *Sight*. He who is ignorant of Revelation, or rejects its aid, can only store his mind with such ideas as are formed by objects which the visible world presents to his view ; beyond which if he attempts to extend his researches, he is presently bewildered and lost. But the Christian calls in *Faith* to his aid ; through which is conveyed to his mind such an accession of light and information as makes him a character of a different kind. As far as God sees fit to impart knowledge to him, he becomes acquainted with the spiritual and invisible world ; he ascertains his rank in the scale of creation ; he learns his duty and his destination ; and is enabled to form a just comparative estimate of things temporal and eternal.

The Infidel, however, will deny the whole of this statement ; and will ridicule the positions on which it is founded.—He will contend, that to walk by *Sight*, (interpreting the expression to denote the *intellectual* as well as the *bodily* faculty of perception,) is to walk by Truth and Wisdom ; and that to walk by *Faith*, is to be guided by mere Enthusiasm or Imagination. He will allege the absurdity of relying upon any thing short of absolute demonstration, on topics intimately connected

with virtue and happiness; and will urge many arguments to shew the mischiefs of *credulity*, and the danger of trusting to any other guide than the light of Nature.

An endeavour has already been made to detect the sophistry concealed under this show of argument; and reasons have been adduced to evince the inability of man to frame a Religion for himself, or to attain to a knowledge of spiritual and Divine truths, by any helps which either Natural or Moral Philosophy can afford him. But however certain it may be, that neither *Physics* nor *Ethics* can lead to a knowledge of Divine things, or of Religion, properly so called; yet it still remains to be considered, whether the Science of *Metaphysics*, which professes to instruct us in the Philosophy of *Mind* rather than of *Body*, may not answer the purpose; and enable us, without the help of Revelation, to acquire all the information that is necessary, respecting our relation to the spiritual and invisible world. On this point a few words may be requisite, as introductory to our main design, that of proving the reasonableness and necessity of taking *Faith* for our spiritual Instructor.

Great things have been said by great men in commendation of Metaphysics: but it does

not appear that its competency as a guide to Divine Truth has ever yet been clearly shewn. Among the philosophers of the Gentile world this Science included *Theology*; as it does in the present day among those who reject Revelation. The father of English Philosophy<sup>a</sup>, however, (in his treatise on the advancement of human learning,) does not admit its pretensions to instruct us in such knowledge; but assigns to it a distinct province, more nearly allied to Natural Philosophy; so that, according to his arrangement of the Sciences, it holds a middle station between Physics and Theology; differing from the former in this particular only, that whereas it is the province of physics to inquire into the *efficient* or *operative* causes of things, it is the province of Metaphysics to investigate their *formal* and *final* causes. Physical Science professes to explain the means by which natural phenomena are produced; Metaphysical, to ascertain their first principles, or to discover *how* it is that such and such causes produce such and such effects.

With what difficulty and embarrassment such investigations are attended; and how seldom they are so successfully pursued as to lead to a discovery of even the ultimate

<sup>a</sup> Lord Bacon.

*secondary* causes, (if such an expression may be allowed,) by which any effects are produced; it is needless for our present purpose to describe. But, admitting that the study of Metaphysics were capable of conducting us thus far, still it does not appear that we should thereby be advanced one step nearer to an acquaintance with the spiritual or invisible world. This view of the Science of Metaphysics shews it, indeed, to be confined within the same limits, and to labour under the same defects, as that of Physics; because, like that, it cannot carry its researches beyond those phenomena of the natural world which are perceptible by our outward senses. Neither does it seem possible, however skilful we may be in the exercise of our powers of mental abstraction, to conceive the *forms* or *qualities*, of which this Science professes to treat, without some ideal reference, at least, to the objects in which those forms or qualities are inherent; a consideration, which seems sufficiently to prove, that Metaphysics (according to this acceptation of the word) cannot lead us to a knowledge of any thing purely spiritual.

But modern professors of this Science aim at higher flights, and venture by its aid upon the most sublime and subtle disquisitions;



proceeding as if the human mind were capable, by its own internal operations, to form ideas altogether unconnected with sensible objects. This, indeed, is not peculiar to modern times; since Aristotle himself (to whose interpreters we owe the introduction of the term *Metaphysics*) extols the Philosophy of *Mind*, or the *First Philosophy*, and the *Universal Science*, (as he emphatically calls it,) above all other branches of human knowledge.

That we are able to investigate the powers of our own minds, and, from analogy, to form some comparative estimate of the intellectual powers of other beings, may be admitted; but the concession will be of little avail in proof of the sufficiency of *Metaphysics* to lead us unto Divine Truth.—For, what is the result of the most sublime discoveries in this boasted Philosophy of Mind? It terminates in enabling us, from internal consciousness or reflection, and from attentive observation of the phenomena of the human mind as exhibited in human conduct, to ascertain, with some degree of precision, in what respects mind differs from body; what are its essential faculties and attributes; and what the objects on which it may be successfully employed. But beyond the powers of

its own species, nay, perhaps, beyond its own individual powers, it is in vain for the human mind to extend its researches. Its insight into the spiritual world is necessarily confined within these narrow limits; and whenever it attempts to pass them, it is involved in darkness and uncertainty.

Taking Metaphysics, therefore, in the highest acceptation which belongs to it as a branch of human Science, it must ever be found incompetent to lead us into Theological Truth; because Theology springs from another and a higher source than either the material world or the mind of Man; it issues, and can issue only from the Divine Intellect, and therefore, unless we suppose man to have *innate* ideas of such Truth, we cannot conceive any other mode by which it may be communicated to the human mind, than that of a Revelation from God. “Hardly,” says the Wise Man, “do we guess  
“aright at the things that are upon the  
“earth, and with labour do we find the  
“things that are before us: but the things  
“that are in heaven who hath searched out?  
“or thy counsel who hath known, except  
“Thou give Wisdom, and send thy Holy  
“Spirit from above<sup>b</sup>?”

<sup>b</sup> Wisdom ix. 16, 17.

In short, *Metaphysical* knowledge, if the term be used to denote science of things spiritual and Divine, is, properly speaking, *supernatural* knowledge; and he who insists that it is attainable by the light of Nature only, seems in effect to assert, that natural and supernatural, visible and invisible, human and divine, are terms of equal extent and signification. Very different, however, is the language of St. Paul, who says, “what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God<sup>c</sup> :” intimating, that the principles of human Science are not applicable to Divine subjects. Philosophy must search after them in vain; because there is nothing in man, that is, nothing in the mind of man, which can give him any conception of them. Neither is there any thing in the external visible world which can convey to him, without Divine instruction, ideas of what they are. They are known only to the Spirit of God; they must emanate, therefore, from that Spirit; and can only be communicated to man, in such way, and in such measures, as God shall see fit to impart them. Hence the same Apostle elsewhere remarks, with

<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 11.

reference to spiritual things, that, “*now* we “know *in part* :” our knowledge of those subjects being derived only from such particular communications as God sees fit to make to us; and that “we see through a “glass darkly,” not the things themselves, but the images of them, by reflection from the light of Revelation. We know no more than is revealed to us, nor can the utmost efforts of ratiocination enlarge our knowledge beyond the limits which God hath thus prescribed to it.

Having urged such considerations as seem to deprive the Philosopher of the only substitute for Faith which he can presume to offer as an instructor in spiritual things, we are now to inquire whether it be reasonable to take *Faith* for our guide, and whether we can submit to its direction without degrading the dignity of our nature.

“Faith,” says the Apostle to the Hebrews, “is the substance of things hoped for; the “evidence of things not seen<sup>d</sup>.” It makes us acquainted with objects not discernible by the light of Nature. It embodies, as it were, our hopes, and renders them substantial and certain. In our spiritual concerns, therefore, wherein “we look not at the things which

<sup>d</sup> Heb. xi. 1.

“are seen, but at the things which are not “seen<sup>e</sup>,” the necessity of “walking by Faith, “not by Sight,” appears to be self-evident. To creatures born for immortality, and ordained to live for ever in a future and invisible world, there must be many things to be “hoped for,” and many things “not seen;” concerning which we may justly be solicitous, although they are not, and cannot be, the objects of our senses, nor discoverable by any exertion of our intellectual faculties. If, then, there *be* such things, with which it behoves us to be acquainted, and which it is natural for us to be exceedingly desirous of knowing, let the proficient in mere human Science declare how we can attain to a knowledge of them *without Faith*; or let him tell us how we can be assured that our future as well as present happiness does not depend on our entertaining right notions of them? Respecting the former of these questions, the Philosophical Unbeliever must disprove every thing that has hitherto been alleged as to the insufficiency of the light of Nature to shew us Divine Truth:—respecting the latter, he must produce arguments to prove either the non-existence of spiritual and invisible things, or the impossibility of our being in any manner



connected with them. In both instances, he will be found to act in contradiction to *analogical* Reasoning, no less than to the principle which he endeavours to overthrow. For, the necessity of Faith, or something similar to it, even in the common affairs of life, and in every branch of human Science, has been insisted upon with great strength of argument by learned men: whence it has also been maintained, *à fortiori*, that in things *Divine* it is still more indispensable.

We contend, therefore, for the reasonableness and the importance of Faith, as the only principle on which a knowledge of Theological subjects can properly be grounded, and because there is no inlet through which such knowledge can be communicated, but that of *Divine instruction*. And as Divine instruction can be of no effect, unless those to whom it is vouchsafed are willing to receive it as *necessarily and indisputably true, on account of the source from which it is derived*, it follows that all who renounce Faith as their guide must be content to remain in ignorance of the truths thus imparted, however important or necessary they may be.

We see, then, in what sense it is that Faith and Sight are properly opposed to each other. With *human Science Faith* has little concern;

that is to say, it is not the *principle* on which our assent to philosophical truth is founded, although without something similar to it we might often be obliged to remain sceptical and incredulous respecting some of the most generally received and indisputable positions. *Divine Truth*, on the other hand, depends as little upon *Sight*, or sensible demonstration, for the certainty of its doctrines; since although our belief in *Revelation* is necessarily connected with the evidence of Sense and human Testimony, (for, “*Faith*,” says the Apostle, “*cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*,”) yet our assent to the truths so revealed is grounded solely on the *Authority* by which they are declared. Thus radically different in their principles are philosophical and theological knowledge. The subjects which each professes to investigate; the end which each proposes; and the *media*, through which each arrives at the desired information; are so manifestly dissimilar, that indiscriminately to confound them, or to make the deductions of the one serve as criteria of the truth of the other, appears to be as unphilosophical as it is irreligious.

Faith, then, being (according to the foregoing observations, and according to the definition given of it by a Writer who has treated

the subject with peculiar accuracy<sup>f</sup>) “an Assent grounded, not upon the internal Reason and Evidence of the thing, but upon the bare Testimony and Authority of the speaker;” the main point to be considered is, whether it be unreasonable to believe any thing on mere *Authority*? and this again will depend on another point, namely, on *what kind* of Authority we believe?

Fully to discuss these points, it would be necessary to consider at large the force of both human and Divine Testimony, in order to ascertain their respective weight and importance. But this would lead to a detail of the historical or external evidences of Revelation; and would thus anticipate what is reserved for future consideration. For the present, therefore, we shall suppose the question undetermined, whether the evidences of Revelation be *sufficient* to command our assent; and shall merely endeavour to shew, (in answer to the *à priori* arguments of Unbelievers,) that Faith is not, *in itself*, absurd or irrational; but that, *supposing it to be supported by its proper Testimony*, it is no less convincing and satisfactory than Scientific Demonstration.

To prove this, two postulata only are neces-

<sup>f</sup> Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. 2. p. 54.

sary to be admitted, as constituting the foundation of the argument; first, that it is *possible* for God to reveal his will to mankind; and secondly, that whatever He reveals to them *must be infallibly certain and true*. These postulata have immediate reference to the *Omnipotence* and the *Veracity* of God; attributes so essential to his nature that we cannot frame any rational notion of Him without them. Some Infidels, indeed, professing themselves Deists, seem to call them in question. Others admit them without hesitation. Others, again, appear to acknowledge or reject them as may suit the turn of their argument. But all who attempt to controvert them are compelled to have recourse to *atheistical* principles; however they may assume to themselves the character and denomination of *Deists*.

Admitting, then, these two positions as indisputable, where can be the absurdity or unreasonableness of *Faith*? That God, when he created Man, endued him with faculties sufficient for all the purposes of his existence, it were impious to doubt: but to suppose that He gave him faculties by which he was to become *independent* of the Divine aid or control, is a supposition without warrant or foundation. Nay, it is not only unsupported

by authority or proof, but is contrary to what we might reasonably *expect*, from considering the relation that subsists between the creature and the Creator. Were man, indeed, destined only for *this* world ; then, to walk by *Sight*, to concern himself only about the things here presented to his view, and to be utterly regardless of what relates to the invisible world, might be his wisdom and his duty. But if the Almighty created him to be an heir of immortality and a partaker of his everlasting kingdom ; is it not reasonable to suppose that He would afford him such instruction relative to that future and invisible world, as the objects here before him are incompetent to supply ? Can it be imagined that a benevolent and all-wise Creator would suffer His creature, man, to remain in ignorance of the Divine Will ; or to fail, through want of due light and information, of attaining the great end of his being, and the most perfect happiness of which his nature is capable ? From these and other similar considerations we are almost necessarily led to suppose, that the Almighty would reserve in his hands such a direct *Authority* over us, and such means of interposing in our concerns, as should continually remind us of our subjection to Him, and convince us



that we are dependent on His Will for every thing we can hope for or enjoy.

But here the perverseness of the Infidel sometimes displays itself in an argument of a different kind. He will acknowledge the weight of such considerations as may be brought to prove that the light of Nature is insufficient to give us a knowledge of Divine truths; and he will even admit that we must either be content to remain in ignorance of these truths, or receive them through the medium of *Faith*: but he will aver that we may safely remain in ignorance of such Truths; which, in his estimation, cannot possibly be of *importance* to us, if the knowledge of them be unattainable by our natural faculties: and, regarding Revelation as a still more dubious guide than the light of Nature, he will urge that it is better altogether to forbear inquiry into subjects of such a kind, and to renounce our belief of them, than to submit to the guidance of a principle so liable to deceive and mislead us.

How far it accords with true Wisdom, to remain in wilful ignorance rather than attain to knowledge by means which God is pleased to afford; it must be left to such professors of wisdom to explain. But the inference that we may *safely* remain in ignorance of Divine

truths, because we have no other means of knowing them than by *Faith*, can hardly be considered as conclusive. Before it can be admitted, these *negatives* ought first to be proved:—that it is *not* the Will of God that we should have any knowledge of spiritual and Divine truths; that they are *not* in any respect connected with our duty or our happiness; that it is *not* impeaching God's Veracity, or shewing any contempt of His Authority, to reject or disregard His communications; that He will *not* call us to account for any such irreverence or disobedience towards Him; or lastly, (as was before observed,) that it is either *not* possible for God to make such communications; or, if possible, that they are *not*, when made, infallibly certain and true. Some or other of these negatives, the Deist (who argues that, because Divine truths cannot be known but by Faith, therefore such truths are neither necessary nor important to be known) is bound to demonstrate; for, as to Revelation being a more dubious guide than Reason, it amounts to nothing less than an assertion that the *Divine* Wisdom and Truth are less to be relied upon than *human*.

Here, however, it may be objected, that in what has been advanced respecting the

reasonableness of Faith, we seem to *prejudge* the main question, by taking for granted that such Testimony *may* be produced in proof of a Divine Revelation as to make our Belief in it a rational assent. But it should be remembered, that in entering into a discussion of arguments *à priori* against Revelation, our sole object has been to establish such general principles and rules for the investigation of its Evidences, as should ensure it a fair and impartial hearing. We are, therefore, at present, as much entitled to suppose that those Evidences *may* be good and valid, as the Infidel is to suppose *the contrary*: while we only clear the way for a thorough examination of them, by a removal of those preliminary objections which Infidels allege as sufficient to preclude the necessity of the inquiry. This we are certainly warranted in doing, nay, we are compelled to do, if Unbelievers insist that their arguments *à priori* are of such weight as to disprove the truth of Christianity, whatever external proofs we can bring of its coming from God. Even in matters of *human* Science, if a perverse objector, determined to bring into discredit some generally received system of Philosophy, were to insist that he could demonstrate from reasoning *à priori*

that it was false, notwithstanding all the experimental proofs which could be brought to establish it; the opposite party would be at full liberty, in contesting the point with his adversary, to take for granted the certainty of the experiments themselves, and to expose the futility of any such reasoning as might turn out to be contradictory to actual fact. And, in like manner, if Infidels pretend that they can demonstrate the falsehood of Revealed Religion by such kind of reasoning, without regard to the validity or weakness of the Testimony to be produced in its favour; they must submit to have their arguments canvassed as if the reality of its external evidences were for the present conceded.

It is the design of these observations, to shew, that to believe on sufficient *Authority* is no less certain an indication of a sound understanding, than to believe on the evidence of *Sense* or of *abstract Reasoning*; and that, since we can receive no knowledge of Divine Truths but from *Divine Instruction*, Faith, or a reliance on the authority of God, is the proper and the only medium through which such truths can be communicated to the Understanding. God hath given us senses to convey to our minds ideas of the ma-

terial world. He hath given us ability to discern (though not fully and completely) the relations, fitnesses, forms, qualities, and other attributes, of whatever the visible world presents to our view. He hath also gifted us with an internal sense of consciousness, by which we make considerable progress in the study of ourselves, and deduce from the phenomena of the human mind, as from the phenomena of the external world, many useful truths, of a practical as well as of a speculative nature. From these and various other faculties of body and of mind we derive all our physical and metaphysical knowledge, every thing, indeed, which properly constitutes *human* science. Moreover, it hath pleased God to bestow upon us such a measure of Intellect as renders us capable of receiving whatever knowledge of a higher kind, relating to Himself and to the spiritual or invisible world, He shall see fit to *superadd* to the knowledge which we acquire through the medium of our senses and the exercise of our reflecting powers. This simple theory of the human mind, while it leaves to man ample scope for advancement in knowledge by the proper use of those powers; reserves at the same time to the Almighty, his inalienable prerogative of being the direct In-



structor of mankind in their highest and noblest concerns. When, therefore, it is said (as it sometimes is, with an evil intention of exalting man's dignity to the disparagement of that of his Creator) that God hath endued us with natural faculties sufficient to enable us to fulfil all the purposes of our being; the position, though true, must be understood in a limited and qualified sense; as denoting, not that our natural faculties are sufficient to guide us into all truth without *His* help and instruction; but that they render us capable of receiving his instructions, and particularly of distinguishing that which He communicates from that which is purely the result of our own investigation. To judge thus accurately between matters of Science and matters of Faith, is one of the highest and most important functions of the human understanding: and to decide properly upon their respective weight, is one of the most certain characteristics of a sound and unperverted judgment.

The Faith, therefore, for which we are here contending, is not to be likened (as Infidels are wont to liken it) to mere opinion or hypothesis for which there are no solid grounds; neither is it to be considered as

the offspring of Enthusiasm or Imagination. It rests upon the most solid basis ; even upon the Wisdom and Truth of God, who is incapable of error or deceit. With respect to *certainty*, it claims, indeed, the preeminence above all *human* Science whatever : and although the truths with which it is conversant, issue not from Reason as their parent source ; yet Reason herself receives them, when communicated, as of paramount authority to any which can be derived from other channels.

If it were necessary further to vindicate the Divine dispensation, in thus obliging us to “walk by Faith,” as our guide in spiritual concerns ; we might shew, that it is perfectly conformable to the general procedure of God’s providence in the natural world ; that it is highly suitable to our present condition and circumstances ; and that it serves many excellent purposes conducive to the happiness of Man and the glory of God. As, in the natural world, we see that all things advance by slow and gradual progress to maturity and perfection ; so, in the spiritual world, we are trained by passing through a state of imperfect knowledge to one that will be more satisfactory and complete. We “walk by Faith” now, and “see

“through a glass darkly,” that our thoughts and desires being gradually enlarged and spiritualized, we may become better qualified to undergo that great change which is prepared for us, when, according to the Apostle’s expression, we shall see “face to face,” and “know even as we are known.” Such a state of preparation and discipline is also best suited to our present nature. For, as our Lord once said to His disciples, “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now<sup>g</sup> ;” so it may be said to every man, in his present earthly state, that there are many things hereafter to be more fully revealed, which he is *now* unable to bear. Faith, which conveys to us but a partial though a most certain knowledge, is better adapted to our finite capacities and comparatively feeble understandings than the blaze of perfect illumination, on subjects too wonderful and excellent for us to attain to, until we shall have put off our earthly tabernacle. It seems, indeed, probable, not only that our faculties are at present *incapable* of receiving greater degrees of information on these subjects than is communicated through the medium of Faith ;

but that, even if we *could* attain to greater degrees of it, our affections would be too much elevated, and our attention drawn off from those important duties which belong to us as pilgrims on earth, and without the performance of which we cannot become meet to be partakers of our heavenly inheritance.

It is not to be doubted, therefore, that God requires us to “walk by Faith,” for the purpose of correcting our pride, and teaching us the necessity of bringing our understandings as well as our affections into subjection to His Will. Thus are we constantly admonished to acknowledge His Wisdom and Truth; to trust in Him; to have recourse to Him for light and instruction; to set the highest value upon His communications; to restrain our presumptuous curiosity; and “not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.” By setting such bounds to our *Sight* as to disable us from walking by it in our spiritual and everlasting concerns, He shews us the value and importance of *Faith*; leading us imperceptibly to that entire deference to His Wisdom and conformity to His Will, which constitute the foundation of all true Religion and all substantial happiness.

Hence we may likewise perceive, why the Apostle so emphatically declares, that “without Faith it is impossible to please God.” It is impossible without it to please Him; because Unbelief implies a distrust of His perfections; being a virtual denial of His power, His wisdom, or His goodness. The Unbeliever precludes himself also from becoming “wise unto salvation,” or attaining to such a knowledge of God as may enable him to understand and perform His Will. Thus debarring himself of power to fulfil the end for which he was created, he must, of consequence, become an object of displeasure and condemnation to the Great Author of his being.

For the same reason it is apparent, that every thing in our moral and religious conduct which does not spring from Faith in God is not only precarious in its effects, but radically defective in its principle; because whatever we do as moral agents, ought to be done with reference to the Divine will, which lays us under an obligation paramount to every other. Hence all those admonitions in Scripture, which inculcate the necessity of “living by Faith,”—“walking by Faith,” and the like, are perfectly reconcilable with every just notion of wisdom and expediency;



since to “walk by Faith, not by Sight,” in matters where the evidence of our Senses and the light of Nature must necessarily fail us, and nothing but the word of God can sufficiently instruct us; is agreeable to the soundest Reason and the purest Philosophy.

In the attempt which has here been made to vindicate the reasonableness and the necessity of Faith, a sufficient refutation may, perhaps, be found of some of the most favourite positions of Deistical Writers; who never cease to inculcate upon their readers the absurdity of trusting to *Authority* only, of whatever kind, and on whatever subject. Thus, some of these insist, that in matters of *Religion* our own notions of moral fitness or expediency are to be considered as the sole criterion of Truth: others, that since Faith precludes, from the very nature of it, all occasion of argument, if God require us to walk by Faith, it proves that he never intended we should exercise our reason in the act of believing; but should admit contradictions and absurdities as readily as the clearest and most convincing Truths:—others, in like manner, that to be guided by Revelation, is to renounce our Reason:—others, again, that Reason having nothing to do with Revelation, and mankind in general

being incapable of either proving or understanding it, there can be no obligation to believe it, or even to take it into consideration. These arguments are presented to us under various forms. But we have one short answer to return to all of them:—that Faith in a Revelation which is attested by sufficient external evidence of its coming from God, is in itself *the highest act of Reason*, because it is a reliance on perfect Wisdom and Truth; that real contradictions and absurdities cannot possibly find place in such a Revelation, however difficult it may be to reconcile some of its positions with our finite notions; and that the knowledge which is hereby conveyed to the understanding is the most *certain* of any that can be obtained, inasmuch as whatever comes from God must be *infallibly true*.

We may say, therefore, with the Apostle, “we know in *Whom* we have believed:” we know that we are relying upon an Omniscient and Perfect Instructor, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and to whose Will all things that are in heaven and in earth must bow and obey. This is the foundation of our hope. To bereave us of it, the Infidel must prove that God hath *not* made such a revelation of His Will, that is, he must dis-

prove the *testimony* which we allege as the ground of our belief. Until he can do this, we are at liberty to reject all his arguments *à priori*; because (however they may be disguised by the arts of specious and ingenious sophistry) they must ultimately rest on one or other of two suppositions, which are both of them palpably false, the *Perfection of Man*, or the *Imperfection of God*. Presumption, therefore, and impiety are at the very foundation of such reasoning; which it behoves us to avoid, with “fear and trembling,” lest “being lifted up with pride, we fall into the “condemnation of the Devil<sup>h</sup>.” From that condemnation, and from the sins that lead to it, God grant that we may ever be preserved!

<sup>h</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 6.

## SERMON XVII.

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1 COR. i. 25.

*The foolishness of God is wiser than men.*

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THE Apostle, in using this remarkable expression “the foolishness of God,” must be understood as sarcastically reflecting on the arrogance of those Philosophers who presume to call in question the wisdom of the Christian Dispensation. Many of these stigmatized the Gospel as “foolishness,” and treated it with scorn and contempt. The Apostle, therefore, takes up the expression and adopts it as his own, for the purpose of more effectually mortifying the pride of those who had thus applied it to Divine Revelation. “We preach Christ crucified,” says he, “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” As if he had said, This foolish-

ness (as you call it) is wiser than your wisdom ; it is too wonderful and excellent for you ; higher than your most aspiring thoughts can reach ; deeper than your profoundest meditations can fathom : and too firmly established to be overthrown by any efforts which you can make for its subversion.

This proposition, that “the foolishness of “God is wiser than men,” may be considered as the converse of another which the same Apostle lays down in a subsequent chapter, (and which has already been made the subject of our consideration,) that “the wisdom “of this world is foolishness with God.” As, on the one hand, the endeavours of human Philosophy to investigate Divine truths *without* the light of Revelation are foolishness in the sight of God, who hath so constituted us as to make all such endeavours fruitless and unavailing ; so, on the other hand, its attempts to impute foolishness to the ways of God, and to exalt itself *against* His revealed will, can only terminate in betraying its own weakness, and more conspicuously manifesting the wisdom of the Most High.

The inference from these two propositions, conjointly taken, is, that the Gospel is not only worthy of our most earnest attention, because it furnishes us with knowledge unat-



tainable by the light of Nature ; but that it ought to be received with all humility and deference, as coming from authority which we cannot lawfully oppose, and as dictated by wisdom which we shall in vain seek to depreciate. Could we succeed in impressing upon those who investigate the principles of the Christian Faith a thorough conviction of these truths, that “the wisdom of this world “is foolishness with God,” and that what some dare to call “the foolishness of God, is “wiser than men;” we should have done all that is necessary to ensure it that consideration which its extreme importance demands. But, unhappily, most of the arguments by which Infidelity is supported imply a rejection of one or other of these propositions.

With a view to expose the weakness of those visionary theories of Natural Religion which rest for their support on the supposed perfection of the human understanding, an endeavour has been made to shew that man is unable to attain to a knowledge of Divine truths without Faith in the revealed will of God : and many *facts* in the history of man, as well as arguments from the nature of the thing itself, have been alleged, as decisive of that fundamental point. It still remains,

however, to inquire how far man may presume to *sit in judgment* upon Divine Revelation. For, it may be contended, that admitting human Reason to be unable to *discover* religious truths by the light of Nature; yet since it is certainly given to be the guide of our conduct, it must be deemed competent to *judge* of any thing which God may be pleased to reveal to us, and to decide whether its doctrines and precepts be worthy of acceptance: or, in other words, that the *credibility* of Revelation must be determined by its agreement or disagreement with our opinions of its fitness and expediency.

It should seem that St. Paul furnishes us, in the words of the Text, with a very cogent reason, why this supposed right of sitting in judgment upon a Divine Revelation should not be admitted, except under such restrictions and limitations, as will render it of little avail in promoting the purpose of Infidelity. For, as the imperfection of man's natural faculties makes it "foolishness," in him, to trust to *them* only for a knowledge of Divine truth; so the perfection of the Divine wisdom seems to make it no less irrational on his part, to question the truth of any thing which God reveals. If he be obliged to go to the Fountain of Wisdom and Knowledge for instruc-

tion in spiritual truths; it behoves him to receive that instruction with a full reliance on its entire sufficiency

But as this is a point vehemently contested by Unbelievers, and as a right determination of it will strike at the root of some of their most plausible arguments, it may be proper to give it a more distinct consideration.

We might, indeed, argue, on general grounds, that unless the principle here contended for be admitted, Revelation itself is rendered nugatory. For, to what purpose is Revelation given to man? If merely to *confirm* him in his preconceived opinions, whatever they may be, is not this assuming, what it has already been shewn can never be conceded, that the light of Nature will enable him to find out the Truth, and that nothing more can be necessary for him to know, than what may be thus discovered? If, to *correct* his opinions, or to give him *new* ideas of Religion, which he could not have without it, how can *this* purpose be answered, unless man receive it with deference to its Divine Author, and esteem it as of greater certainty than any knowledge which he can derive from other sources?

But, regardless of the dilemma to which he might be thus reduced, the Infidel will still

contend for the sovereignty of Reason in this, as in every other case ; for how, it will be said, can we ever attain to a *rational* conviction of any truth whatsoever, if we do not follow the guidance of *Reason*.

To remove this difficulty, it is necessary, that we clearly understand in what sense the term *Reason* is used, when it is spoken of as a criterion of Truth.

Reason is a word susceptible of various acceptations : but there seem to be only two general notions of it in which it can properly be understood, with reference to the present subject. It may serve to denote the faculty of perceiving truth, of whatever kind, and through whatever channel conveyed to the understanding ; or it may signify the discursive exercise of the intellectual powers. If taken in the former sense, arguments have already been brought to prove that it is unable to discover or perceive any thing relating to *spiritual* truths, except so far as it is enlightened by Revelation ; Divine instruction being the only medium, or inlet, through which ideas of *such* truths can be communicated to the mind. If it be taken in the latter sense, then it is evident that its attainments must be limited by the extent of the intellectual powers. For if the human un-

derstanding, however strong and vigorous, be, in its very nature, of limited capacity, its operations must be limited likewise : and if it cannot discern truth without light to make it discernible, the exercise of it where there is not a sufficiency of light must be to no purpose. In whichever sense, therefore, we admit the term Reason, all the knowledge to be attained by it, and, consequently, all the certainty of the judgment which it can form, will depend, in the first place, on its capacity of perception ; and, in the next place, on the outward means and opportunities afforded to it of obtaining the requisite information.

Now, all the arguments alleged for trying Revelation at the bar of human Reason, as the proper judge of its wisdom and expediency, are evidently grounded on the assumption that there is a certain infallible criterion of Truth, implanted in the mind, antecedent to any Revelation of the Divine Will, and by virtue of which man hath a kind of dispensing power within himself, to limit, supersede, or abrogate, whatever appears to him to differ from that rule, notwithstanding the clearest evidences with which it may be accompanied of its proceeding from God.



But that this is a false assumption, resting on no solid grounds whatever, and contradicted by observation and experience, has already been proved. It has been shewn, not only that it is unreasonable to imagine that when God had created man he left him to the guidance of this supposed law of Nature, without vouchsafing him some express Revelation of his will; but also, that there is positive testimony of his having imparted such a Revelation, and of his having afterwards, “at sundry times, and in divers manners,” made further declarations of his Will to mankind. Unless the Unbeliever could shew that this has *not* been done, it must ever remain impossible for him to prove, that there is any such thing as a Law of Nature entirely distinct from, and independent of the *revealed* Law of God, much less that the former is of superior force and obligation to the latter, when the latter is (as we here suppose it to be) duly and sufficiently attested.

Admitting, however, as a mere hypothesis, that there ever had been a time, when man was not subject to any law of Revelation, but was left solely to the guidance of this imaginary law of Nature, still it would remain to be inquired, whether it had not *since* pleased

God to put him under subjection to a *revealed* law. Should this prove to be the case, it must be absurd to say that the law of Nature is the *only* law which God hath ordained for man to walk by; and scarcely less so, to say that it is a law of *paramount authority* to every other. For if, as the advocates for Natural Religion usually contend, man be obliged to obey the Law of *Nature* because it is of *Divine authority*, why not the law of *Revelation* for the same reason? Supposing the ground of obedience to the former to lie in its conformity to the Divine Will, no reason can be assigned why we should not be equally obliged to conform to whatever God may see fit to *superinduce* upon that law. So far, indeed, from its having any claim, by virtue of this *priority* in point of date, to be revered as of greater obligation than the *revealed* Will of God, it should seem that it ought to yield to it on that very account; since as the last Will of a Testator always supersedes those of an earlier date, so the last authoritative declaration of the Divine Will must necessarily take place of every preceding one.

But waving any further arguments grounded on concessions to the Unbeliever, it may suffice to observe, that whether that which is

called the law of Nature be *subsequent* or *precedent* to revelation; whether it be of great or of little authority; this, at least, must be acknowledged, that Revelation *professes* to impart to men the knowledge of things which the light of Nature cannot possibly make manifest. It professes to disclose truths highly interesting to man and absolutely necessary to his well-being, of which natural Reason knows nothing and can conceive nothing. Is it not, then, unreasonable, to insist that Revelation should be measured by the standard of Natural Religion, when Natural Religion hardly pretends to any previous acquaintance with the subjects of which Revelation treats? If, indeed, the Unbeliever were already in possession of such information respecting the Divine nature and counsels, as might enable him by positive *evidence* to disprove the truth of what Revelation declares, then he would be entitled to attention. But without some proof of his real *knowledge* of these points, his objections must be regarded as the objections of ignorance only, and as of little more weight than the opinions of an uninformed peasant upon the abstrusest parts of the Newtonian system.

In short, in whatever point of view the

subject be placed, the same arguments which shew the incapability of man, by the light of Nature, to *discover* Religious Truth, will serve likewise to shew that, when it is *revealed* to him, he is not warranted in *judging* of it merely by the notions which he had previously formed. For, is it not a solecism, to affirm that man's natural Reason is a fit standard for measuring the wisdom or truth of those things with which it is wholly unacquainted, except so far as they have been supernaturally revealed?

“But what, then,” (the Unbeliever will say,) “is the province of Reason? Is it altogether useless? or are we to be precluded from using it in this most important of all concerns, for our security against error?”

Our answer is, that we do not lessen either the utility or the dignity of human Reason, by thus confining the exercise of it within those natural boundaries which the Creator himself hath assigned to it. We admit, with the Deist<sup>a</sup>, that “Reason is the foundation of all certitude:” and we admit, therefore, that it is fully competent to judge of the *credibility* of any thing which is proposed to it as a Divine Revelation. But we deny that

<sup>a</sup> Toland's Christianity not Mysterious.

it has a right to dispute (because we maintain that it has not the ability to disprove) the *wisdom* or the *truth* of those things which Revelation proposes to its acceptance. Reason is to judge whether those things be indeed so revealed: and this judgment it is to form, from the *evidence* to that effect. In this respect, it is “the foundation of certitude,” because it enables us to ascertain the *fact* that God hath spoken to us. But, this fact once established, the credibility, nay, the certainty of the things revealed, follows as of necessary consequence; since no deduction of Reason can be more indubitable than this, that whatever God reveals must be true. Here, then, the authority of Reason ceases. Its judgment is finally determined, by the fact of the Revelation itself: and it has thenceforth nothing to do but to believe and to obey.

“But are we to believe every doctrine of Revealed Religion, however incomprehensible, however mysterious, nay, however seemingly contradictory to Sense and Reason?”

We answer, that Revelation is supposed to treat of the subjects with which man’s natural Reason is not conversant. It is therefore to be expected, that it should



communicate some truths not to be fully comprehended by human understandings. But these we may safely receive, upon the *authority* which declares them, without danger of violating truth or probability. *Real* and *evident contradictions*, no man can, indeed, believe, whose intellects are sound and clear. But such contradictions are no more proposed for our belief, than impossibilities are enjoined for our practice; though things difficult to understand, as well as things hard to perform, may perhaps be required of us, for the trial of our faith and resolution. *Seeming* contradictions may also occur; but these may seem to be such, either because they are slightly and superficially considered, or because they are judged of by principles inapplicable to the subjects, and without so clear a knowledge of the nature of the things revealed, as may lead us to form an adequate conception of them. These, however, afford no solid argument against the truth of what is proposed to our belief: since, unless we had really such an insight into the mysterious parts of Revelation as might enable us to prove them to be contradictory and false, we have no good ground for rejecting them; and we only betray our own ignorance or perverseness, in refusing to take God's word

for the truth of things which pass man's understanding.

The simple question, indeed, to be considered, is, whether it be reasonable to believe, upon competent *authority*, things which we can neither discover of ourselves, nor, when discovered, fully and clearly comprehend? Now, every person of attentive observation must be aware, that unless he were content to receive solely upon the testimony of others a great variety of information, much of which he may be wholly unable to account for or explain, he could scarcely obtain a competency of knowledge to carry him safely through the common concerns of life. And with respect to scientific truths, the greatest masters in Philosophy know full well that many things are reasonably to be believed, nay, *must* be believed, on sure and certain grounds of conviction, though they are absolutely incomprehensible by our understandings, and even so difficult to be reconciled with other truths of equal certainty, as to carry the *appearance* of being contradictory and impossible. This may serve to shew, that it is not *contrary to Reason*, to believe, on sufficient authority, some things which cannot be comprehended, and some things which, from the narrow and circum-

scribed views we are able to take of them, appear to be repugnant to our notions of truth. The ground on which we believe such things, is the strength and certainty of the *evidence* with which they are accompanied. And this is precisely the ground, on which we are required to believe the truths of Revealed Religion. The *evidence* that *they come from God* is, to Reason itself, as incontrovertible a proof that they are true, as in matters of human science would be the evidence of sense, or of mathematical demonstration.

But to shew more particularly that the exceptions usually taken to the doctrines of Revelation originate in an undue stretch of the prerogative of human Reason, let us take a cursory view of the most prominent of those doctrines, and consider whether it be possible to refute them, by any reasoning drawn from the light of Nature.

The great points, on which Revealed Religion professes to instruct us, are the nature of God, the Fall of Man, his Redemption by Jesus Christ, his Sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and his title to Eternal Life on the terms and conditions of the Gospel-Covenant. On these great subjects, it propounds several doctrines which Infidels treat as “foolish-

“ness;” but for the most part with scarcely any other reason for thus judging of them, than that they are above the reach of man’s natural wisdom.

With respect to the Godhead, or Divine Nature, it is acknowledged that the doctrine of Revelation is *incomprehensible* by human Reason, and can only be received by Faith in the Divine word. But what has Reason to set against this doctrine, or with what arguments can its truth be controverted? What knowledge can any man obtain of the Divine nature, which will enable him to judge of it with clearness and precision? That this article of Faith is contradictory to reason or to any known truth, can never be demonstrated; because there is no contradiction in saying that things or persons are different in one sense, yet the same in another; and this is all which is positively affirmed respecting the Trinity in Unity. To form a clear conception of the Godhead, “neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance,” must, indeed, transcend our finite powers. But that the doctrine is *per se* impossible to be true, it must as far exceed our ability to prove. Unbelievers, however, seem to forget, that in order to demonstrate the *falsehood* of any position,

some clear and certain *knowledge* of the subject to which it relates is previously necessary; and that the very circumstance of its being *incomprehensible*, makes it impossible for us to prove that it is really contrary to the nature of things. The distinction, therefore, between things incomprehensible and things incredible, is as wide as between the *knowledge how* a thing is, and the *belief* that it *is*, upon mere evidence of the fact. That which we are unable fully and clearly to comprehend, can never be proved repugnant to truth, but may be rendered as *credible*, nay, as *certain*, by the weight of *Divine authority*, as the plainest and most evident propositions. All reasoning upon such a doctrine, proposed by such authority, seems to be precluded, except that which is necessary to assure us of the certainty of its having been actually revealed.

The Fall of Man, with the consequent corruption of our nature, is also a question which baffles philosophical investigation. That human nature is now frail, perverse, and prone to evil, is indeed almost indisputable, notwithstanding the reluctance of many to acknowledge so humiliating a truth. But *how* this came to pass, is only to be known by evidence of the fact. In vain will the Philosopher attempt to solve this question,



without having recourse to such evidence; and in vain will he attempt to set aside that evidence, by reasoning *à priori* on the improbability of the thing. Let him disprove, if he can, the testimony, whether human or divine, by which the matter of fact is supported;—but let him not presume to oppose testimony by speculative reasoning; lest haply he be found, to be not only arguing against truth, but “fighting against God.”

The *Redemption of Mankind* by Jesus Christ, is another doctrine, which calls for an entire deference of the human understanding to the *authority* of Him by whom it hath been revealed. The Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Lord, the Atonement which he made for the sins of men, and his Mediation and Intercession on their behalf at the throne of Grace, are Mysteries which we shall in vain endeavour to unfold by the help of Philosophy. The writings of Infidels abound with the most irreverent and indecent cavils at every part of this wonderful Dispensation. But, without entering into any minute replies to their sophistical arguments, we may summarily convict them of *presumption*, in bringing doctrines of such a nature to the test of human judgment. For, how is man to be instructed in the expediency, fitness, or necessity, of the Divine dispensations?

“ Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or  
“ who hath been his counsellor<sup>b</sup> ?”—On what  
*data* can we ground any opinion of the con-  
duct, which it was most befitting God to  
pursue, towards his sinful and rebellious crea-  
tures? Are our notions of His nature and at-  
tributes, or our acquaintance with His secret  
will and purpose, sufficiently full and clear,  
to enable us to form a correct judgment on  
so vast a subject? “ Shall the thing *formed*,  
“ say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou  
“ *made* me thus<sup>c</sup> ?” Or shall the creature  
who is *redeemed*, say to Him who redeemed  
it, why hast thou *saved* me thus? why hast  
thou ransomed me at so great a price? why  
hast thou sacrificed such a victim in my stead,  
or released me at any other cost than my  
own? Who does not tremble (if he have any  
just sense of his own weakness, or of the  
adorable perfections of the Most High) at  
such interrogatories as these? Yet scarcely  
less irreverent are most of the exceptions  
which the Infidel is wont to advance against  
the Christian scheme of Redemption. His  
ignorance, however, as well as his irreverence;  
is manifested, in thus presuming, without any  
adequate knowledge of the subject, to call in  
question the ways of God, and to compel

<sup>b</sup> Rom. xi. 34.<sup>c</sup> Rom. ix. 20.

Him, as it were, to “give account of His “matters<sup>d</sup>” to His corrupt and sinful creatures, who ought rather, with all humility and gratitude, to accept whatever act of mercy He is pleased to offer.

The *gifts* and *graces* of the *Holy Spirit* afford another topic on which Unbelievers oftentimes descant with great freedom and boldness, but not without betraying their inability to disprove what is affirmed on the subject in Holy Writ. For, to argue against the reality of *Inspiration*, or of *Sanctification*, is to argue against that which can only be known from Revelation itself. In the doctrine of Grace, as proposed in the Holy Scriptures, God is represented as the Agent, and man as the recipient of the Divine communications. Nothing can overthrow this doctrine, but positive *proof* that God either *cannot* or *does not* so act, or that man is *incapable* of receiving such impressions. But how shall that proof be obtained, so long as, on the one hand, Omnipotence is acknowledged to be an attribute of God, and on the other hand the structure of the human mind is, at best, so imperfectly understood, that none can clearly ascertain whence its motives, thoughts, and affections, are derived? Here, then, the In-

<sup>d</sup> Job xxxiii. 13.

fidel may (for aught he can shew to the contrary) be arguing against a positive *fact*, in defiance of the most authoritative assurance of its reality, and without any substantial evidence to support his objections.

In like manner, they who, in discussing the terms of the Christian Covenant, presume to question the efficacy of Faith, of Prayer, and of all external Ordinances in Religion, and to controvert in particular the validity of the Christian Sacraments and the Christian Priesthood, will be found to be merely perverse disputers, “understanding neither what “they say, nor whereof they affirm<sup>e</sup>.” For, since the importance and necessity of all these duties and institutions must depend exclusively on *the Divine Will*, by what arguments is it possible for any man to prove their inefficacy? If the *end* of all Religion be to obtain the favour of God, and if by man’s transgression that favour have been already forfeited; who but God himself can ordain the proper *means* of its recovery? When He hath declared the terms of acceptance, and appointed the mode through which his blessings shall be received, who may dispute their fitness? For whether we can clearly perceive this fitness or not, it is reasonable to believe,

<sup>e</sup> 1 Tim. i. 7.

(nay, it is highly unreasonable *not* to believe,) that whatever God wills, as the means of attaining any particular end, must be both requisite and sufficient for that purpose. Every thing, indeed, which Deists advance, for the purpose of setting aside what are called the positive duties of Religion, or proving that its Divinely appointed Ordinances have no intrinsic value, and can minister nothing to the salvation of men, appears to be grounded either upon the unwarrantable supposition that God may prescribe unnecessary or inadequate services, or upon the vain and presumptuous opinion, that man is so perfect and sinless a creature as to stand in no need of Divine help and instruction, in order to render him acceptable to his Creator.

Similar observations might be applied to certain objections which have sometimes been made to the *morality* of the Gospel; in which Infidels argue, for the most part, upon the groundless assumption that man is a competent judge of the Divine wisdom; instead of first inquiring (as all created beings ought to do) what is the *Will* of their Creator, and then reverently submitting to His injunctions.

But in answer to all such objections to the doctrines or precepts of Revealed Re-



ligion, we urge, that if man be naturally ignorant of the truths in which Revelation professes to instruct him, and if he be unable either to prove that they are contrary to fact, or to set aside the authority by which they are declared, he acts irrationally as well as presumptuously in rejecting them. Should he go still farther, and dare to arraign them as "foolishness," notwithstanding the clearest testimony of their Divine authority, then he will fall under the severe censure implied in the Apostle's aphorism, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." This will ever be the case, when the vain "disputer of this world" sets up his own opinion as the standard of the Divine Wisdom, and would reduce the inscrutable counsels of the Most High to the level of his own superficial judgment.

Nevertheless, when we thus endeavour to expose the absurdity of arguing *à priori* against the Divine dispensations, we are continually upbraided, as if we decried the use of Reason, and gave occasion to the mischievous insinuation that *Christianity is not founded on Argument*.

But (as has already been intimated) the proper use of Reason is no more discouraged by the advocates of Revelation, than it is by

the idolizers of Natural Religion. For, Reason is just as capable of viewing objects by the light of Revelation, as by the light of Nature. Revelation does not preclude its use; but lets in fresh light upon it, and helps it to see more clearly and perfectly than it could otherwise do: so that a man might as well affirm that his eyesight was given him only to walk by night, or by twilight, and not at noon-day; as that the right use of Reason is destroyed by Faith, or that Revelation requires men to renounce their understandings.

Reason is never more honourably or usefully employed, than in investigating the proofs of Revelation. But the question is, *what kind* of arguments are fittest for that purpose; those which relate to its *credentials*, or those which relate to its *wisdom* and *expediency*? Is man to sit in judgment upon God; or is he to inquire what God hath revealed, and then submit his own judgment to that of his Creator? This appears to be the proper question; which it might be presumed no rational person could be at a loss to answer. But if vain man will presume to withhold his assent to the truths of Revelation, until he be made acquainted with every particular of the Divine counsels, and can

reconcile them to his own arbitrary notions of propriety and fitness; he invests his Reason with a *controlling* power, subversive of the very foundation of Religion.

But Reason has been called, even by Christian Writers, “the primary guide and “ultimate test of Revelation;” and Infidels are ever ready to extol it as the Alpha and Omega of their creed, and to fall down and worship it as their only Deity. In what sense Reason may be entitled the guide or test of Revelation, the foregoing observations may help us to decide. That it is to judge whether Revelation be credible or not, (that is, whether there be sufficient evidence that it is really a communication from God,) has already been acknowledged. But when it is farther contended, that human Reason, though in possession of no more information than what may be derived from the light of Nature, is the proper standard of Divine truth, and is competent to judge of the wisdom and fitness of what is revealed;—is not this virtually to limit Omniscience to the narrow extent of the human understanding, and to preclude Reason from profiting by any accession of knowledge which God may vouchsafe to impart to it by extraordinary means? Moreover, they who argue that no man can

reasonably believe the truths revealed to him, unless he be able to demonstrate them by some other mode of proof, seem to forget that the very purpose of Revelation is to instruct us in things of which we should otherwise be ignorant, and that we might almost as justly contend, that if a child cannot teach himself, he cannot be taught by others. For, every man is, by nature, a *child*, with respect to knowledge of Divine things; and it is the characteristic of the Faithful that they are “taught of God,” not that they teach themselves. To allege a necessity for our having *antecedent* notions of the truths of Revelation, appears, therefore, to be preposterous. It is sufficient that God hath given us faculties to know and understand His Word, and to be convinced, upon reasonable grounds, that it comes from Him, and is stamped with His authority.

But further to illustrate the inconsistency of attempting to overthrow the doctrines of Revelation by any reasoning *à priori*, we may have recourse to an easy similitude.

Imagine it, then, to be a question of importance to us, whether the other planets in our solar system be inhabited, or not, by creatures like ourselves. Conjectures, plausible enough, might easily be framed,

on both sides: but, if left to ourselves, nothing could possibly be *known*, because we have no *natural* means of obtaining knowledge, upon such a subject. Suppose, then, a Messenger from heaven were sent to declare the affirmative, and furthermore to reveal many particulars concerning it, to us equally new and astonishing, and even of great importance to our welfare, though such as we had never before surmised or conceived. What would be the *rational* mode of conduct, on our part? However wonderful the information of this Messenger might be, yet being totally unable to controvert his assertions, from a want of previous knowledge of the subject, what could we do but examine his *credentials*, in order to judge of his *veracity*, and then believe or disbelieve accordingly? This is the conduct which *Reason* would prescribe.—If the Messenger were credible, the message would be believed; if not, it would deservedly be treated as an idle tale. But to attempt to prove or disprove it by *à priori* reasoning, would be manifestly absurd.

Apply this now to the case of Revealed Religion.—The *importance* of the subject must be admitted on both sides: and the impossibility of attaining a competent know-



ledge of it without a Revelation from God is also to be presumed. *Messengers* professing to come from the Most High, (Moses and the Prophets, and, “in the fulness of “time,” the Son of God himself,) appear on earth, and declare to mortals the great and momentous truths which it contains. What now has man to do? Can he be deemed justifiable in turning a deaf ear to its communications? Or can he, as a rational creature, sit down to consider it *abstractedly*, without reference to its supposed *authority*? If he be by nature incapable of *discovering* its truths, is he not equally incapable of *disproving* them when discovered? How, then, shall he proceed? Surely, he must examine *the credentials of the Messengers*, and exercise his understanding as a man, in closely investigating the proofs that they are sent from God: which being once ascertained, nothing remains but that he carefully attend to the purport of the message, and receive it with humility and reverence.

It must, indeed, be a very high degree of presumption in man, arbitrarily to reject the heavenly message of Salvation, if he be unable to oppose to it, as a *matter of fact*, any thing like substantial evidence. And, in all questions of *fact*, what avails any reasoning

but that which establishes or overthrows the *testimony* by which it is supported? Why, then, will Unbelievers act in a manner so contrary to reason itself, as to urge mere conjectural and hypothetical arguments, against that which is presented to their investigation as a fact depending entirely upon testimony, Divine as well as human, for the proof of its truth and certainty?

Thus has an attempt been made to shew, that the same imperfection of our natural faculties which disables us from attaining, by the light of Nature, to a knowledge of Divine truths, renders it equally impossible for us to disprove them, when they are revealed to us; and that, therefore, how mysterious or incomprehensible soever they may appear to be, or how difficult soever to be reconciled with our previous conceptions, yet we are not warranted by any principles of sound Reason, in rejecting them on such grounds. Hence it follows that no arguments against the truth of Revelation may be considered as admissible, except such as affect the *evidence* of its having been delivered by messengers sent from God. So much, therefore, of the fabric of Deism as rests merely on an assumption that the doctrines of Revealed Religion are unbecoming its Divine Author, falls to the ground,

for want of solid foundation: and how much of what is called Philosophical Unbelief has no other support than this, is well known to all who have examined its principles, and are acquainted with its reasonings.

Since, then, it appears that what the Apostle calls “the foolishness of God” (adopting the language of the Philosophical Unbeliever of his day) “is wiser than men;”—that it is founded on wisdom which is infinite, and therefore by men unsearchable;—on power omnipotent, and therefore by men irresistible;—on goodness and love unbounded, and therefore “passing man’s understanding;”—let us “hold fast the profession of our faith “without wavering;” not, “refusing him that “speaketh,” because he speaketh of things which exceed our comprehension; but reverencing that word, which was accompanied with signs, and wonders, and proofs innumerable of its Divine origin; and which, being thus attested, is not to be presumptuously judged by the wisdom of men, but humbly and gratefully received, as “a true and faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.”

## SERMON XVIII.

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HEBREWS iii. 12.

*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.*

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NO advocate for Revealed Religion, if he well understand its foundations, can be doubtful of success in vindicating its truth, if there be not already, on the part of those whom he endeavours to convince, some predisposition to reject its evidences. Such, however, is the perverseness of human nature, that whatever opposes its corrupt inclinations, is almost sure to be resisted; notwithstanding the clearest proofs that may be brought of its truth. Hence it becomes a matter of prime importance, in contending with those who call in question the credibility of Revelation, to remove, in the first instance, those errors and prejudices which are most likely to prevent them from viewing the subject in its proper light. For,

so long as there is “an evil heart of unbelief;” so long as any opinions or inclinations are cherished which generate a dislike to the Christian system ; there can be little hope of producing conviction ; and we shall only, in such cases, expose ourselves to the charge of “casting pearls before swine,” and “giving things holy unto dogs,” who for our pains will “turn again and rend us.”

It is owing to considerations of this kind, that so large a portion of these Lectures has been occupied in treating of those arguments *à priori*, which seem most materially to affect Revealed Religion ; instead of proceeding directly to the establishment of its truth, by stating the evidences of its Divine origin. For, until the Sceptic or Unbeliever is apprised on what *principles* we mean to contend for the Faith, he will be continually throwing impediments in the way, and embarrassing both himself and us with arguments irrelevant to the subject. But if, in the outset, we come to a clear explanation with him, as to the grounds on which we mean to maintain our position, and protest against recourse being had to any reasonings by which the cause may be prejudged, or the question placed on a wrong foundation ; we are likely to prevent misunderstanding, and have a



better chance of bringing the discussion to a successful issue.

St. Paul asserts, that “if our Gospel be hid, “it is hid to them that are lost;” and our Lord declares this to be “the condemnation” of Unbelievers, “that light is come into the “world, but that men love darkness rather “than light, because their deeds are evil.” We have, therefore, in *our* estimation, the highest authority for asserting, that in all Infidelity there is more or less of perverseness in the *will*, as well as of error in the *understanding*. Accordingly, the most judicious writers have considered Faith as a *moral* duty, and Unbelief as, in itself, immoral and sinful. And the reason is evident; since (to use the words of an acute reasoner already referred to on this subject<sup>a</sup>) “Faith is an act “of the Will, consenting to, embracing, acquiescing, and reposing itself in what the “Understanding represents as proposed and “revealed by God.” It therefore includes *obedience to the will of God*, which is of the very essence of moral duty; and, consequently, Unbelief includes *disobedience* to the Divine will, which is of the very essence of

<sup>a</sup> Norris on Reason and Faith, p. 96.

immorality or sin. "The evil heart," then, "of Unbelief" is not to be classed, as Infidels pretend, among the *involuntary* errors of the Understanding, but is to be ascribed to some perversity of the Will, or predisposition in the mind to oppose the Will of God.

Now, this evil disposition may originate in different causes; nor would it be either charitable or just, to impute to every instance of it the same *degree* of sinfulness or depravity. More or less however of positive sin may be ascribed to it; because without a wrong bias of the *will* men can hardly be led to reject what the Almighty has sufficiently manifested to come from Him and it is inconsistent with the very notion of a Being infinitely wise, powerful, and good, to suppose that in a matter of such moment, he would not afford this *sufficiency of evidence*; or that he would require us, at our peril, to believe that, which after a diligent and unprejudiced examination, should be found defective in this respect. If then God has really made a Revelation of his mind, and men have had it presented to them with as much evidence as HE deems sufficient for their conviction, how can it fail of producing conviction, but through some-

thing perverse and faulty on the part of those to whom it is offered ? Ignorance, indeed, real invincible ignorance, would be an exception to this rule. But whether such ignorance can be pleaded in countries where the Gospel has been promulged, is very questionable; and certainly it cannot be admitted on the part of those who pretend to have tried the Gospel in the balance of Reason, and to have found it wanting.

Of Infidelity in general, *Pride* appears to be the leading cause ; *Pride*, which puts the human understanding in competition with the Divine. This disorderly affection of the mind is only to be subdued by making men sensible of their natural weakness and imperfection. Accordingly, it has been the design of what has already been advanced on this subject, to overthrow the foundations of Infidelity by shewing the inability of man to frame a Religion of his own ; the insufficiency of Natural, Moral, or Metaphysical Philosophy, to lead us to a knowledge of Divine Truth ; the reasonableness of taking Faith for our guide in matters thus beyond the reach of human discovery ; and the impropriety of presuming to judge of such matters by any *à priori* reasoning.

The substance of these arguments may be comprised in the following Propositions :

I. As all Religion is founded in the knowledge of God, of a Future State, and of the Divine Will, a Religion which does not give us satisfactory information on these points, is no Religion at all, or worse than none.

II. Man is unable to acquire any certain knowledge of these points, without Revelation ; and, consequently, is unable to frame a Religion for himself.

This proposition is proved in two ways : from the *fact*, that he never *did* attain to such knowledge ; from the *reason* of the thing, which shews that he never *could* attain to it.

That he never *did* attain to it, appears from a fair and impartial statement of the condition of the Heathen world before the preaching of Christianity ; and of the condition of barbarous and uncivilised countries at the present moment.

That he never *could* attain to it, is proved, by shewing that human Reason, unenlightened by Revelation, has no *foundation* on which to construct a solid system of Religion ; that all human knowledge is derived from external communications, and conveyed

either through the medium of the senses, or immediately by Divine Inspiration ; that those ideas which are formed in the mind through the medium of the senses, can communicate no knowledge of *spiritual* things ; and that, consequently, for this knowledge we must be indebted wholly to Divine Revelation.

In reply to the arguments usually alleged to prove the sufficiency of Natural, Moral, or Metaphysical Philosophy, to guide us into religious truth, it was argued as follows :—

*Natural* Philosophy being wholly conversant with objects of *sense*, it is impossible that the phenomena, which are presented to its investigation, should enable us to discover *spiritual* truths, which have no perceptible connection with *such* objects.

*Moral* Philosophy, without the sanction of Revelation, is radically defective in its principle ; because the foundation of *moral obligation*, properly so called, *is the Will of God* ; and because without Revelation we cannot clearly know in what *relations* we stand to the Supreme Being ; nor be assured that we are paying him an *acceptable* service.

*Metaphysical* Philosophy, although it professes to treat of *mind* as well as of body, and to investigate the forms, qualities, or in-



ternal essences of things, rather than their external characters, is yet incompetent to instruct us in Theology, or spiritual truths ; because its conclusions are drawn either from objects of *sense*, or from the phenomena of the *human* mind ; the former of which cannot advance us to an acquaintance with the spiritual and invisible world ; nor the latter disclose to us the mind and will of God, which is the true source and fountain of all Theological truth.

III. Revelation being thus necessary to enable us to attain to a knowledge of the first principles of Religion ; it becomes reasonable and necessary, to take *Faith* for our guide ; that is, it is reasonable and necessary, that we should *rely on the Divine word*, for our knowledge of religious Truth.

This position rests upon the acknowledged Attributes of God, his Omnipotence, his Omniscience, and his Veracity ; that he is *able* to make what communications he pleases, that his *knowledge* is perfect and universal, and that he cannot *lie*. Unbelievers can only refute this position, by proving that these Attributes do not belong to God, or that the *Divine* wisdom and truth are no more to be relied upon than the *human* : that is to say, they must prove either the

perfection of man, or the imperfection of God.

IV. From man's inability to know any thing of Religion, further than it is revealed to him, and from the necessity of his receiving it by Faith in God's word, it follows, that it is not allowable for him to *judge* of Revelation, upon any principles *subversive of Faith*.

Since Faith originates in a conviction of the wisdom and truth of God, it cannot, consistently with itself, be swayed by arguments which militate against the Divine authority: and since the subjects with which Faith is conversant are things beyond the reach of human intellect, it is bound to receive the truths communicated through Revelation, not as matters of controversy, but as the incontestable dictates of Supreme Wisdom.

Unbelievers can only set aside this proposition, by producing some clear evidence that God hath released men from their obligation to rely upon His Word; which is too absurd to be supposed:—or, by disproving, upon certain and infallible data, what, upon the authority of God's word, we are called upon to believe; which is too blasphemous to be admitted.

From the foregoing Propositions may be deduced two corollaries, which will serve as maxims of controversy in the discussions between Infidels and Believers; and a departure from which may be considered as indicating “*an evil heart of unbelief.*”—First, that Revealed Religion is to be received as true, unless clear and solid arguments can be brought to invalidate the proofs of its *coming from God.*—Secondly, that no argument to that effect is admissible, but such as relates to its evidences as a matter of Fact.

Agreeably to these maxims, our intended defence of Revealed Religion will henceforth be conducted. But if the Unbeliever will contend, that, notwithstanding the proof of Revelation as a matter of fact, it is still uncertain whether it come from God; or that, even if it come from God, man may with impunity reject it; he is then to be argued with not as a Deist, but an Atheist; or rather, he must be left to his own perverse imagination; since he refuses to acknowledge the true and legitimate principles of theological reasoning, and is, therefore, incapable of conviction.

Hence we are led to conclude, that “the evil heart of unbelief” is an expression which may properly be used to denote such

a perverseness of the mind, as determines men to reason concerning Revealed Religion upon principles irrelevant to the subject. When they resort to palpable artifices in order to discredit Revelation; when they confound the matters proposed for discussion with others not connected with them; when they require moral or metaphysical proof of facts which, from their very nature, are incapable of such proof; when they oppose mere hypothesis and conjecture to circumstances which have been verified to the senses of mankind; when they endeavour to weaken the evidence of *known* things, by arguments taken from things which are *unknown*; when they attempt to prove a doctrine absurd or contradictory to reason, merely because it is mysterious and incomprehensible; in short, when they attack truth by arguments inapplicable to the subject;—can we do otherwise than conclude that their hearts are hardened and their understandings blinded, so as to render it impossible, humanly speaking, to remove their errors? And are not the errors of such men justly to be deemed *wilful*? Must they not proceed from some rooted dislike to the truth, some determination to resist it by sophistry and dissimulation, rather than to attempt a refuta-

tion of it by fair and legitimate reasoning?

That far the greater part of modern Infidelity is supported by some or other of the above-mentioned artifices, is capable of the clearest proof. A strong *presumptive* argument of this may be drawn from the manifest reluctance of Unbelievers to enter upon a fair examination of the *facts* of the Christian Revelation. But a more *direct* proof of it is found in the avowed determination of many of them, to reason and argue, as if, even supposing the facts on which it is founded were true, Christianity might yet be a doubtful and disputable matter, and might be considered as the word of *men*, not the word of God. Now, what is this, but virtually *prejudging* the main question? For, if it can be proved that Christianity is the *word of God*, what are all the subtlest arguments in the world, or the boldest opposition to its truths, but disputing and fighting *against God*? And how shall we ascertain whether it be the word of God, or not, but by examining its *credentials*? and what are its credentials, but the direct and positive evidences that it was delivered by persons who exhibited sufficient proofs of their being invested with Divine authority? If an Am-



bassador produce authentic documents under the hand and seal of his Royal Master, to shew that he is commissioned to make known His will and pleasure; what will any *reasoning* avail *against such documents*, for the purpose of shewing the *improbability* of the Ambassador being so commissioned? And if the inspired Messengers or Ambassadors from God prove by the clearest tokens of signs and wonders, that God hath absolutely spoken to them, and “set his seal” to the message which they deliver; who does not see the futility of reasoning abstractedly upon the message itself, in order to set aside its authority? As, therefore, in the former case, we might justly reprove the folly and perverseness of any one who should resist the Royal authority upon such pretences, and might deem him justly liable to punishment for his contumacy and disobedience; so, in the latter case, we could not but consider it as a token of hardness of heart and wilful unbelief, in any one who should oppose the revealed will of God upon no better grounds than his dissatisfaction with the purport of the Revelation.

The inconsistency and impropriety of such conduct may be viewed in a strong light, by comparing it with that of some among the

unbelieving *Jews* who resisted our Lord's claims to Divine authority. We do not find that any of them denied, or doubted, the reality of his miracles. But some would not receive his doctrine, because "none of the "Rulers and Pharisees had believed on him:" others, because he was "a Galilean," and "no "Prophet arose out of Galilee;" with other reasons of a like nature. This was, after a certain fashion, arguing, *à priori*, or finding out *reasons* good and valid, as they pretended, to destroy the weight of plain facts, and to overthrow the clearest evidence of a Divine mission. A modern Unbeliever would, perhaps, be offended at having it supposed that he would object to the Gospel upon such frivolous pretexts. But wherein are *his* arguments more sound or solid? If the *facts*, with which Revelation is accompanied, be sufficient to attest its authority: in what respect are the speculations of vain philosophy more deserving of attention, than these contemptible cavils of the deluded *Jews*?

Having thus endeavoured to shew the insufficiency of all reasoning *à priori* on the subject of Divine Truth, we may now venture to lay down the following positions as axioms, or postulata, on which to ground our

arguments in proof of the credibility of Revealed Religion.

1. That it is *possible* for the Almighty to give such external evidences of a Revelation of His Will, as shall satisfy any reasonable person that it really comes from Him.

2. That, such evidences being given, an implicit acquiescence in the Revelation becomes the bounden duty of all to whom it is made known.

3. That, as moral agents, men are strictly accountable for their neglect or contempt of such a Revelation, and are justly chargeable with the guilt of “an evil heart of Unbelief,” if, without being able to disprove its *evidences*, they reject it upon any pretences of a different kind.

But since Faith is an act of the *Will* as well as of the *Understanding*, and presupposes a mind purified from those vicious prejudices and inclinations which disincline men to the reception of Truth ; we shall in vain lay down rules and maxims for the conduct of this inquiry, unless we admonish them of the *dispositions* with which it must be pursued by all who would bring it to a successful issue.

These may be comprised under the general heads of purity of heart, love of truth, humility of mind, and a reverential fear of God.

“Blessed are the *pure in heart*,” said our Lord, (in setting forth the dispositions required of those who would enter into his kingdom,) “for they shall see God<sup>b</sup>.” The grosser propensities of our nature throw great impediments in the way of religious truth, and either blind men to the perception of it, or lead them to every artifice of perverse ingenuity, in order to elude its force. It is evident that, out of the number of those who speak evil of Christianity, very many are slaves to their lusts and passions, and shrink from every approach to that *light*, which would expose the deformity of their conduct, and discover the certain ruin that awaits them. With such persons, therefore, we enter not the lists.

Neither, on the other hand, can it avail any thing to address ourselves to those who have no real *love of truth*; who, from obstinacy, prejudice, or thoughtless indifference, take no pains to investigate any proofs that may be set before them; but, like Gallio “caring for none of these things,” turn from them with cold and contemptuous neglect. Every one who enters upon an inquiry of this momentous nature, must determine, as Solomon exhorts, to “buy the truth, and sell

<sup>b</sup> Matt. v. 8.

it not<sup>c</sup> ;” to make a sacrifice of his indolence, vanity, prejudice, precipitancy, obstinacy, or any headstrong passions, in his search after it; and not to relinquish it, when found, for any thing which this world can afford. “ My son,” says the same wise teacher, “ if  
 “ thou wilt receive my words, and hide my  
 “ commandments with thee ; so that thou in-  
 “ cline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply  
 “ thine heart to understanding ; yea, if thou  
 “ criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy  
 “ voice for understanding ; if thou seekest  
 “ her as silver, and searchest for her as for  
 “ hid treasures ; then shalt thou understand  
 “ the fear of the Lord, and find the know-  
 “ ledge of God<sup>d</sup>.” How little there is in the world of this genuine love of truth, is but too evident. Yet in vain will it be to hope for any effectual conversion from deep-rooted error and habitual unbelief, unless this disposition can be first excited.

But, thirdly, no man, whatever may be his pretensions to love of truth and purity of heart, can judge of the subject of Revelation as he ought to do, without that *humility of mind*, which the Apostle inculcates, when he exhorts every man “ not to think  
 “ of himself more highly than he ought to

<sup>c</sup> Prov. xxiii. 23.

<sup>d</sup> Prov. ii. 1—5.



“think.”—“If a man,” says the same Apostle, “think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself<sup>e</sup> :” and with such self-deception, it is to be feared, Infidels are generally chargeable. The whole of Philosophical Unbelief, as it is called, appears to be founded upon extravagant notions of the powers of the human understanding. It presumes upon the ability of man to attain to a perfect knowledge of Divine things without the light of Revelation: when, on the contrary, such is man’s ignorance of the spiritual and invisible world, that almost all his speculations on subjects of this kind have terminated in doubt or error, when he has presumed to lean only on his own understanding, and refused to be guided by higher authority. Hence, the total inefficiency of what is called Natural Religion: which overrates the faculties of man, and by setting him to a work wholly disproportioned to his strength, only betrays his weakness, while it increases his presumption.

What, indeed, can be expected from him who comes to the investigation of Revealed Religion with a mind puffed up by a vain conceit of its own powers? Revelation professes to instruct us in things of which we

<sup>e</sup> Gal. vi. 3.

must otherwise be ignorant. But in what light will it be regarded by those who “measure themselves by themselves<sup>f</sup>,” and imagine that nothing which their own understandings will not teach them is worth the acquisition? So fully were the Sacred Writers aware of the impossibility of convincing such men, that they abound with admonitions on this head; warning us “not to be wise in our own conceits<sup>g</sup>,” and declaring that we must become “as little children,” in simplicity and willingness to receive instruction, before we can be converted to the Christian Faith.

From all these considerations we learn, that a modest opinion of our intellectual faculties is indispensable, in those who examine into the truth of Revealed Religion. As far as Reason is competent to form a judgment on the subject, a full exercise of its powers may be allowed and encouraged. But its competency being limited (as has already been shewn) to an investigation of the *evidences* of Revelation; a proper sense of humility will induce us to restrain it from transgressing those limits. It will dispose us to be inquisitive, chiefly, as to the truth of the *facts* alleged to have taken place;

<sup>f</sup> 2 Cor. x. 12.

<sup>g</sup> Rom. xii. 16.

and to believe the *doctrines*, on the authority of those facts. This appears to be the only process, by which certain conviction may be obtained ; and not by presumptuous inquiries, or vague conjectures, respecting the fitness or probability of the doctrines themselves.

All the great truths of Revelation are, indeed, proved or corroborated by some striking *facts*, wrought for the confirmation of our Faith. The doctrines of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of his offering himself as a Sacrifice for the sins of mankind, are attested by our Lord's miraculous conception and by his submission to the Death upon the Cross. Of the certainty of a general Resurrection "God hath given assurance unto all "men in that he raised Christ from the "dead<sup>h</sup>." By his visible ascension into heaven, our Lord confirmed his declaration to his disciples that he would "go to prepare a "place for them, that where he was they "might be also<sup>i</sup>." The promise of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to "abide with them "for ever<sup>k</sup>," he ratified, after his departure from this world, by the great Miracle of the Day of Pentecost. These fundamental articles of our Faith are, therefore, not to be

<sup>h</sup> Acts xvii. 31.

<sup>i</sup> John xiv. 3.

<sup>k</sup> John xiv. 16.

considered as abstract propositions, capable of being proved or disproved by *à priori* reasoning; but as truths which, to us, derive their credibility partly from the *facts* performed in attestation of them, and partly from the *authority* of the Sacred Writers established by other miraculous facts. If we were to *reverse* this order of proceeding, and begin with an abstract inquiry into the proofs of the Incarnation of the Son of God, his Atonement for our sins, our future Resurrection, our Sanctification, and our Inheritance of Eternal Life; we might dispute *ad infinitum* upon every one of these topics, and as the Apostle says, be “ever learning, and never “able to come to the knowledge of the “truth<sup>1</sup>.” And the reason is this:—that, considered apart from the facts recorded in Scripture, we have no sufficient *data*, on which to establish any proof of their reality: but as soon as those facts are ascertained, we proceed on sure ground, and cannot be mistaken in our conclusions, if we reason upon them as we ought to do. From all which it appears, that, whatever right we may have thoroughly to scrutinize the evidence of those facts, and the authority of the Sacred Writers, (and this right no believer in the Gospel will

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 7.

desire to call in question,) yet, supposing these points to be once ascertained, the truths themselves are to be received with all humility of mind, not as matters of doubtful disputation, but as bearing the stamp of Divine infallibility.

Another disposition, therefore, connected with that humility which is here inculcated, and equally necessary in all who would enter upon the study of Revealed Religion, is a *reverential fear of God*; leading us to entertain worthy notions of His perfections, and to submit *our* will and understanding to *His*, as soon as we are certified of his having spoken unto us. “If any man,” says our Blessed Lord, “will do His Will, he shall know of “the doctrine, whether it be of God.” Such a man will be inquisitive no farther, than to obtain sufficient evidence that God hath made such a Revelation. He will not dispute about the fitness of its doctrines, or the certainty of its being founded in wisdom and goodness; but will regard these points as fully established *by the authority of God’s word*. He will, therefore, easily “*know* whether the “doctrine be of God,” because he will only investigate the *testimony* of its being so; not perplexing himself with captious or presumptuous questions irrelevant to that main object.



But the advocates for making human Reason the sole arbiter and judge of the *system* of Revealed Religion, as well as of its *evidences*, oftentimes argue as if it were possible that a Religion attested by all the *extrinsic* proofs that can be given of Divine authority, might, nevertheless, be full of errors, absurdities, and falsehoods:—and then they triumphantly ask, what would become of us if we did not use our Reason to detect its fallacies? But is not this supposition irreconcilable with every notion we can frame of the perfections of the Supreme Being? For, what is it but to suppose that God may suffer even a *false* Religion to be attested by such wonderful works, such a “demonstration of “the Spirit and of power<sup>m</sup>,” (as the Apostle emphatically speaks,) as it is impossible for man not to consider as betokening the Divine interposition, and consequently giving the Divine sanction to the things so declared? Moreover, what shadow of proof or of probability is there, that any system of error or falsehood was ever thus attested?

This supposition, however, is frequently urged, not only for the purpose (as it is said) of more effectually securing us against decep-

<sup>m</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 4.

tion, but also to prevent the possibility of charging God with being the Author of systems inconsistent with or contradictory to each other. For, it being assumed by all Deistical Writers that Natural Religion, or the Law of Nature, is the *primary* and *fundamental* rule by which God ordained that man should be directed, it is hence argued, that unless we establish this as the criterion, by which to judge of the truth of Revealed Religion, we may make God appear to contradict himself.

But to this the Christian replies, that what is called Natural Religion, or the law of Nature, is not supported by such testimonies of its *Divine* authority as the law of Revelation, nor has it any other definition or sanction than such as arises from *human* opinion. He contends, therefore, that Revelation being once proved by competent external evidence to have God for its Author, it is necessary that all antecedent opinions respecting moral and religious truth, and consequently this supposed law of Nature itself, should be submitted to it as to an infallible standard; since otherwise, by setting up a rule of less certainty in competition with this, we may be the occasion of “charging God foolishly” with inconsistencies and contradictions, which

originate only in our own imperfect views of the subject.

Now which of these, the Deist, or the Christian, regards his Maker with the truest *reverence*, it cannot surely be difficult to determine. The one is satisfied with such evidence as God is pleased to give him of His interposition, and considers the Divine perfections as sufficient vouchers of the truth of what is revealed:—the other treats this as a *doubtful* matter, unless he can adjust it to the standard of his own opinion.

Thus far may suffice as to the dispositions with which it behoves every one to enter upon an examination of Revealed Religion. Nothing more is requisite, than that we come to the consideration of it with minds duly prepared to acquiesce in its proper proofs, and well instructed in the *principles* on which our Faith is to be grounded. If the Unbeliever, though unable to controvert those principles, will yet refuse to abide by them, must he not stand self-convicted, and will he not be justly chargeable with the “evil heart of unbelief?” For, what is an evil heart of unbelief, but a determination to disbelieve, unless such evidence be produced as the subject does not admit?

We must expect, however, a vehement

outcry, and heavy accusations of bigotry, prejudice, and uncharitableness, whenever we presume to fix this charge upon the philosophical Infidels of the age. Yet what would *they* think of men, who, in the investigation of any *other* kind of truth, should refuse to judge of it by its appropriate principles, and insist upon bringing it to the test of some arbitrary criterion of their own? If a man should sit down to the examination of a question in Experimental Philosophy, determined to disregard the evidence of his *senses*, and to decide upon it by mere abstract reasoning; would they acquit such a man of absurdity and perverseness? would they admit his pretensions to sincerity and love of truth? Yet where is the difference between such a man, and the Infidel who slights the *evidences* of Revealed Religion, and refuses, upon the testimony of plain facts, to acknowledge its Divine origin, unless he can prove its truth in some other way? Is not this the only difference, that the former cherishes, perhaps, a harmless folly; while the latter maintains *his* error at the hazard of everlasting destruction?

Here, however, it may be asked, “do we mean, in thus resting the truth of Revealed Religion on its *external* evidences, to exclude all endeavours to illustrate the *inter-*

“*nal* evidence which it affords of the wisdom “and goodness of God?”—Certainly not. The Christian dispensation is proposed to mankind, not only for their acceptance, but for their devout contemplation. It is intended to excite in them love, gratitude, and obedience to its heavenly Author; and therefore cannot be studied with too deep attention. Abundant as it is, in proofs of God’s mercy, justice, wisdom, and truth, we have the greatest encouragement diligently to try and examine it, according to the measure of the ability which God hath given us; and the more faithfully and impartially it is considered, the brighter will be the evidence of its Divine origin. This we may confidently affirm, after the many clear and luminous expositions of its entire system, and the many admirable defences of its particular doctrines, which have been produced, in answer to the various cavils of its opponents. Very ungrateful should we be to the Authors of such vindications, and to that Providence which raised them up as champions of the faith, did we not acknowledge our obligations to them, as affording to the Believer more clear and enlarged conceptions of the Divine wisdom and goodness than he might otherwise have formed, and oftentimes lending a sea-



sonable aid to the cause of Christianity, by repelling the minute and captious objections of Infidels, and shewing them to be founded in ignorance or misrepresentation.

Nevertheless, since, even in the wisest and best men, human Reason has a taint of infirmity and corruption; since, with all the light of Nature and of Revelation, man is unable fully to comprehend the length and breadth, and depth of the Divine counsels; and since, being a dependent creature, he is not privileged to sit in judgment upon the Creator; we contend, that the truth of Revealed Religion is not to be determined by our perception of its internal excellence, but by its external proofs. More than this, (if we can do more) may conduce to our own comfort and edification, and, possibly, to the conviction or confirmation of others. But the *foundation* of our belief is the evidence of its *Divine Authority*: and our Faith is made to rest on this *only* foundation, that it “may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God<sup>n</sup>.” They who insist upon proving the truth of Revelation by its internal evidence, or by a demonstration of its fitness and expediency, treat it as if it were

of *human*, not of *Divine* origin. For, *Man*, indeed, has no right to expect assent from his fellow-creatures to the truth of any system he proposes, unless he can shew that it is, in itself, wise and good. But *God* commands with authority. His *Word* is sufficient evidence, or sufficient *surety*, at least, that whatever he proposes to us must be true and perfect.

Most unjustly, therefore, are believers in Revelation charged with despising Reason or Philosophy, in their proper use and application. Reason as clearly dictates that we should “walk by *Faith*,” in things spiritual, as that we should walk “by *Sight*,” in things natural : and when St. Paul arraigns “Science “*falsely so called*,” as mischievous in its tendency, it is implied that there is science, or a *true* and sound Philosophy, to which no such character is attached. The lover of true wisdom will delight in the discovery of Truth of every kind. But as he will be more especially a lover of “the wisdom which is *from above*,” he will be careful to discriminate between the principles of *human*, and those of *Divine* wisdom. The spirit of *Man*, exercising his natural faculties, and guided

by the light of Nature, is competent to the attainment of the *former*: but the Spirit of God alone can instruct him in the *latter*, to which he must be guided by the light of Revelation. Revelation, therefore, is the beginning and the end of all religious knowledge: and whether it teach us more or less; or in whatever degree it be bestowed upon us; the extent to which *it carries* us is the *ne plus ultra* of our researches into spiritual things.

Thus it appears to be essential to the very idea of a Divine Revelation, that it is not proposed, like matters of human science, as a subject of discussion for the disputers of this world, but is delivered in the plain and authoritative mode of instruction; and that, as proceeding from the fountain of wisdom and perfection, it can neither be refuted, nor improved upon, by those to whom it is propounded. We must come, therefore, to the consideration of it, with a deep sense of its importance; with an earnest desire to know and to do the Will of God; with an awful regard to the infinite disparity between Divine and human knowledge: and with a firm determination to accept and abide by whatever is revealed to us, if we find it accompanied with sufficient testimonies of its being

the work of God. “As the eyes of servants  
“look unto the hands of their masters, and  
“as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of  
“her mistress; even so must our eyes wait  
“upon the Lord our God<sup>p</sup> ;” receiving his  
word with reverence, reposing an entire con-  
fidence in his justice and goodness, and de-  
siring no other assurance of the wisdom of  
his dispensations, than that they really pro-  
ceed from *Him*.

This is, according to the Apostle’s admoni-  
tion, “not thinking of ourselves more highly  
“than we ought to think, but thinking so-  
“berly, according to the measure of Faith<sup>q</sup>.”  
It is “bringing into captivity every thought  
“to the obedience of Christ<sup>r</sup> ;” and shewing,  
that we do not “receive honour one of an-  
“other, but seek the honour which cometh  
“from God only<sup>s</sup>.” The effect of these dis-  
positions of humility and reverence cannot be  
doubtful. Their natural tendency is to pro-  
duce sober and dispassionate judgment ; and  
their promised reward is the Divine aid and  
blessing : for God will never be far from  
them that truly seek him, nor fail to enlighten  
those who earnestly desire to understand his  
will. With such dispositions let us prosecute

<sup>p</sup> Ps. cxxiii. 2.

<sup>q</sup> Rom. xii. 3.

<sup>r</sup> 2 Cor. x. 5.

<sup>s</sup> John v. 44.

our inquiries; in full assurance that he will enable us to unravel the sophistries of perverse gainsayers, and will effectually reward our labours, by “granting us, in this world, “ knowledge of his truth, and, in the world to “ come, life everlasting.”



## SERMON XIX.

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2 PETER i. 16.

*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but were eye-witnesses of his majesty.*

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IT has been already stated, that all the arguments respecting the credibility of Revealed Religion may be arranged under two general heads;—reasoning *à priori*, or that which relates to its abstract probability and fitness,—and reasoning *à posteriori*, or that which relates to its evidences as a matter of fact. The former of these having been discussed at large, in order to shew that no objections grounded on *à priori* reasoning can be of sufficient validity, against positive testimonies in support of Revelation; we are now to enter upon an examination of those testimonies, and to repel the attacks of Infidels upon the main bulwarks of our Faith. But before we

proceed to this inquiry, a few preliminary observations may be expedient on the nature of that reasoning which is now intended to be employed, and its application to the present subject.

Reasoning *à posteriori* is that by which we infer causes from effects, and is generally considered as the surest method of proceeding in our researches after truth. For it has been justly remarked, that “what is first to Nature, is not first to Man. Nature begins “with *causes*, which produce *effects*: Man “begins with *effects*, and by them ascends to “*causes*”<sup>a</sup>.” Indeed, all reasoning founded upon an arbitrary assumption of causes, can be, at best, but hypothetical and uncertain.

If this be the case with respect to knowledge in general, still more evidently must it be so with respect to subjects of *historical* inquiry; since the truth of history depends exclusively on *facts*, and is incapable of any other demonstration.

Now, the subject of Revealed Religion is, in these latter ages, inseparably connected with historic truth. For though it demands our belief of many doctrines, the proof of which, if abstractedly considered, might seem to require a different mode of investigation,

<sup>a</sup> Tatham’s Bampton Lect. Vol. I. p. 18.

yet with respect to *our* knowledge of them, historical evidence is the proper and only medium through which to ascertain their truth. The very notion of Revealed Religion supposes that God hath spoken to man, that he hath communicated something which must have been known to proceed from Him, and of which all men may be certified, by inquiring into the evidence of the *fact*. This fact, therefore, whether He hath made any Revelation, must, like any other fact, be, to all but those to whom it was *immediately* communicated, a matter of historical investigation: and the argument for the truth of the *doctrines* revealed will entirely rest on the proof of this fact. For if it be proved that God hath really spoken, no farther evidence is necessary to prove that *what* He hath spoken *must be true*.

The argument *à posteriori*, then, in favour of Revealed Religion, stands thus. There have been certain *facts*, which could only proceed from the power of God:—therefore, the *doctrines* attested by those facts are infallibly *true*. The Divine Attributes are here assumed as *postulata*, upon which the argument is founded: and whether that argument may be justly applied in favour of the Reve-

lation for which we contend, is the question now to be considered.

And here our subject naturally divides itself into two general topics: first, the proof from *human* testimony of the facts relating to Revealed Religion; secondly, the proof that these facts are of such a nature as to include in them *Divine* testimony to the truth of the things revealed; and this latter part may be again subdivided into the particular topics of Miracles, Prophecy, and Inspiration.

The present discourse will be confined to a consideration of the former part of the subject, or the proof from *human* testimony of the facts relating to Revealed Religion.

St. Peter declares, in the words of the text, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” St. John also affirms, “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life;—that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you<sup>b</sup>.” These are direct appeals to

<sup>b</sup> I John i. 1, 3.

human testimony, challenging the strictest investigation.

To obtain a satisfactory assurance of the facts on which the truth of Christianity depends, and to exhibit them in a clear and connected point of view, the simplest mode of proceeding will be, to trace the history of Christianity upwards from the present time to the date of its commencement, that we may ascertain whence it came and what was its origin.

That there are at this day whole nations professing the Christian Faith, adhering to its Ordinances, supporting its Priesthood, and adapting their laws, customs, and institutions, to its precepts, is a matter of too great notoriety to need particular proof. That it has long been the established Religion in many countries, (and in our own especially,) where the grounds and reasons on which it is received have been most rigorously scrutinized by learned, acute, and impartial men, who have decidedly given their suffrage in its favour, is equally certain. That it was the Faith of our Ancestors, so far back as the era of the Protestant Reformation, when it underwent a close examination by persons of various religious persuasions, none who are in any wise conversant with History will



attempt to controvert. That during nine preceding Centuries, the profession of this Faith, by some who held it in purity, and by others who held it in corruption and unrighteousness, was made the occasion of great revolutions in states and empires, and continually occupied the attention of mankind, let the histories of Popes and Councils, and of almost every civilized nation, testify. That early in the seventh Century a gigantic imposture was set up in opposition to Christianity, and spread through various countries, (which imposture recognised, nevertheless, the historical truth of the Scriptures on which the Christian Religion is founded,) is another fact too well certified to require a formal proof. That, still more remotely, the Emperors Justinian, Theodosius, and Constantine, took Christianity under their protection, established it as the Religion of the Empire, and incorporated it into their laws and institutions, are also facts which admit of no dispute. That the Emperor Julian, though a bitter enemy to the Gospel, never called in question the truth of its records, is no less clearly ascertained. And that, for three Centuries previous to the reign of Constantine, this same Religion was known, professed, and practised, and, even under cir-

cumstances of the greatest discouragement and persecution, “grew mightily and prevailed,” its most determined adversaries have never been able to disprove. But here we are compelled to pause. Beyond the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, the very *name* of Christianity is unknown :—and lo ! just at this period of time, the Sacred Writers declare the birth of its Founder to have taken place, and the many other wonderful circumstances to have come to pass which have ever since been regarded as constituting the foundation of this system.

These are positive facts, as well authenticated as any that have ever been related. How, then, will the Unbeliever account for so general and uninterrupted a reception of the Gospel, upon the supposition that it was originally a mere fable and imposture ? How came it into the world ; and who were the authors of it ? What can explain so extraordinary, so singular a phenomenon, in the annals of mankind ?—The Adversary of Christianity must leave these points in darkness and uncertainty. Let us hear, then, what account the *Believer* is prepared to give.

Taking, in the first place, the Sacred Historians for his guide, he answers as follows.

In the reign of Augustus Cæsar, a remark-

able person, named JESUS, was born in the land of Judæa, who, though of lowly parentage and education, came forth at an early age as a Teacher sent from God ; wrought numberless miracles in the presence of multitudes of spectators ; astonished all who heard him by the excellence of his doctrines, and the “authority” with which he declared them ; won the admiration of all men by his spotless life and conversation ; boldly rebuked the vices, corruptions, and errors of his countrymen, even of those who were most distinguished for learning and authority ; predicted many very extraordinary events which exactly came to pass ; made disciples of men of low birth and mean occupations, whom, though uneducated and ignorant, he enabled to preach with great power and effect, and to perform many wonderful works ; forewarned these men, that neither he nor they were to receive in this world any recompense of wealth, power, or reputation, but that they would be exposed to continual poverty and persecution ; “went about doing good” to all, both friends and enemies ; endured the utmost malice of the Jewish Rulers and the madness of the people ; submitted to the most cruel and ignominious sufferings with unparalleled meekness and

fortitude; died, and was buried in a sepulchre purposely secured and guarded to prevent any attempt on the part of his followers to fabricate a story of his revival; rose again, nevertheless, on the third day, and appeared at sundry times to his disciples; and, lastly, ascended visibly into heaven, blessing his Apostles, and promising that, within a short time, they should be “endued with power from on high,” and miraculously gifted through his name to shew signs and wonders, to cast out devils, to heal the sick, to speak with new tongues, to preach the Gospel among all nations, and spread abroad the knowledge of it to the uttermost parts of the earth.

This narrative, contained in the writings of the four Evangelists, is followed by a circumstantial account of the fulfilment of this last promise of Jesus, in the sudden and miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles; whence they were empowered to speak languages of which they were before wholly ignorant, to work great and signal miracles, and to preach doctrines far beyond the wisdom of man to invent or to conceive. This they did, notwithstanding the rage and bigotry of the Jews, and the proud philosophy of the Heathens; making proselytes of

all nations, and among all ranks and degrees of men, though without bribe to offer, worldly interest to promote, or any means of gratifying the corrupt passions of human nature ; and finally sealing with their blood the truth of the doctrines which they taught, and of the facts which they attested on their own personal knowledge.

Besides these preachers of the Gospel, there was also one of still more extraordinary character and circumstances, a man bred and born a Jew, a bigoted disciple of the strictest sect of Judaism, a vehement persecutor of the followers of Jesus, and stimulated by interest and inclination to do every thing in his power to crush this Religion in its very infancy. Yet was this man suddenly, and in a most wonderful manner, converted to faith in the Gospel, became one of its most strenuous and successful Preachers, and suffered martyrdom for its sake.

Respecting facts of so extraordinary a kind as these, it seems impossible that any persons professing to relate them from their own personal knowledge should be themselves deceived ; and equally impossible that they should impose them on others as true, if they had not really taken place. The evidence of men's senses is the proper proof of



all human transactions : and nothing is here related of which the senses of mankind were not fully competent to form a judgment. There was also the greatest publicity in the things said to have been done : and they were of such a nature as not to admit of any imposition by art, or any fallacy from accidental causes.

But what assurance have we that these things were really recorded by eye and ear-witnesses of the transactions, or that the accounts of them were delivered by *cotemporary* writers, and not forged in after-times ?

Many striking circumstances concur to prove that we cannot be mistaken on this point.

The existence of Christianity at the present moment, and the regular unbroken chain of history by which it may be traced to the very date of its commencement, afford a strong argument to this effect. In this history there is no chasm whatever ; nor can any period be assigned of a later date than that of the supposed transactions, in which so extraordinary a narrative as that contained in the writings of the Evangelists *could* have obtained credit, if it had been unfounded in fact. The nature of the circumstances recorded, the silence of preceding ages concerning them, the authority of public records

to which appeal must have been made, and the palpable *novelty* of the Christian Institution, though pretending to have been a matter of general notoriety from the very time of its Founder, could not but have instantly detected so gross a deception.

But we have a still stronger proof of this, in the institution of the Christian *Sacraments* and the Christian *Priesthood*, and also in the sanctification of the *first* day of the week, instead of the seventh, in commemoration of our Lord's Resurrection. The observance of these solemn Ordinances, and the formation of the Church under the government of the Apostles and their successors, were to be regarded as badges of the Christian profession. If, then, the writings in which the institution of these Ordinances is recorded, had been a mere forgery at some later period, how could they have been received as true; since the very mention of such things having been enjoined and observed from the date of the facts related, must have furnished intrinsic evidence of the imposture? This affords incontestable proof of the authenticity and the truth of the Christian Scriptures. For as the things therein narrated could not have been believed by persons *cotemporary* with the events, unless they had actually

taken place ; so neither could they have been believed at any *subsequent* period, because they specify as matters of public and general notoriety, institutions and memorials founded upon those events, which, had they not been so founded, every one would have been able to disprove.

*Pagan* Historians bear testimony likewise to some of the principal facts on which Christianity is founded. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny, intimate, that in their times great multitudes were distinguished by their belief of these facts, and by their adherence to the peculiar doctrines and institutions of the Gospel. Evidence of the same kind in Jewish and Heathen Writers of succeeding ages is so abundant, as to have enabled Christian advocates to compile a connected history of the establishment of Christianity from hostile testimony *alone*.

It also appears that the writings of the New Testament were received as genuine, during the three first centuries of the Christian era, and were often quoted, both by the friends and enemies of Christianity, as authentic and unquestionable documents. An additional confirmation of their truth arises from the formal recognition and settlement of the *Canon of Scripture*, in the next Cen-

tury ; which assures us of the great caution and diligence that were used to separate the spurious from the genuine writings, at a time when means could not be wanting of determining with accuracy their respective pretensions.

That these writings have come down to us in a sufficiently pure and unadulterated state, no reasonable doubt can be entertained, when we consider the number of Synods and Councils, in which many controverted questions were agitated with acrimony and vehemence, and in which the disputants on either side would, no doubt, have readily availed themselves of any proof of corruption or interpolation of the Scriptures, if such could have been brought against their respective opponents. To this we may add another proof of the same kind, derived from the labours of Infidels, in every age, to bring the Sacred Writings into disrepute ; which could not in any way more effectually have been done, than by proving them to be spurious, or even questionable as to their genuineness and authenticity. But since they still subsist and obtain general acceptance, notwithstanding all those labours, what can we conclude, but that the weight of evidence on their side is irresistible, and that the facts which they

record are established beyond the possibility of refutation ?

Farther evidence than this for the truth of the Gospel History, can hardly be expected or desired by reasonable men. But a still stronger confirmation of it may be derived from viewing it in connection with the preceding Jewish and Patriarchal Dispensations.

When we have traced the history of the Gospel to the birth of its Founder, we are naturally led to inquire, what was the state of Religion antecedently to that period ; and whether Christianity appears to have been connected with any circumstances which had already taken place.

Here the first thing which presents itself to our consideration, is the prevalent expectation at that time, both among Jews and Gentiles, of some extraordinary person, in whom certain very ancient predictions should be fulfilled, and whose fame should be spread throughout the world. This expectation was evidently derived either from the Jewish Scriptures, or from Patriarchal traditions, and thus bears testimony to those antecedent Dispensations of Revealed Religion, which we are now to consider as connected with that of Christianity.



The existence of Judaism at the time of our Lord's coming into the world, is almost as indisputable as the existence of Christianity at the present moment: and we shall find it equally difficult to account for the former as for the latter, without admitting the truth of its history. The Jewish as well as the Christian Religion was founded upon facts of such a nature as precluded the possibility of deception; and the observance of several Institutions in commemoration of them, may be traced upwards, through an uninterrupted course of history, from the time of our Lord's appearance to the date of the facts themselves. It is demonstrable that the same Religion subsisted during that period among the Jews, (under their several captivities as well as in their own country,) without any change in its exterior polity or its internal doctrines, notwithstanding great difficulties, discouragements, and persecutions; and that they were preserved in the practice of it by what *they*, at least, regarded as signal interpositions of Divine Providence.

The account which the Jews have uniformly given of the *origin* of their Religion, is that which is found in the books of Moses, written nearly fifteen hundred years before Christ: and it is easy to judge, whether such

facts as are related in those books *could* ever have been received as true by the whole Jewish people, if they originated in enthusiasm or imposture.

No man who reads the narrative of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, of the miraculous plagues inflicted upon their oppressors, of the forty years' journeying in the wilderness, of the remarkable occurrences which took place during that period, and of the many peculiar rites and ordinances instituted thereupon, can doubt that these were things which every one who saw them must be capable of attesting, and were of such a nature as to make it impossible that the senses of any who witnessed them should be imposed upon by artifice or delusion. Here, as in the case of the Christian Religion, is a series of *facts* easy to have been proved or disproved at the time when they were said to be wrought, and also several *ordinances* of a peculiar and appropriate description, designed to keep those facts in remembrance.

If, then, it be asked, "might not an Impostor deceive a whole people by pretending to do such things as Moses did: or might not some other Impostor afterwards fabricate an account of these pretended transactions?"—the answer is, that the na-

ture of the *facts* clearly refutes the former supposition; and the nature of the *institutions* founded upon them as clearly refutes the latter. For, as no man could make a whole people believe that he had laid the country in which they lived under desolation by unheard-of plagues of a preternatural kind, and that he had conducted them for forty years together through a scene of perils, trials, and deliverances unparalleled in the history of mankind, *without having actually performed such things*;—so no man in after-times could induce that people to believe, that such and such ordinances and memorials of those events had been constantly and religiously observed by that very people, ever since the events took place, *if neither such events had ever happened, nor such ordinances and memorials were then really existing*. And since the entire system of the Jewish polity, civil as well as religious, presupposes the actual existence of these proofs of its origin, it is utterly incredible that, at any period whatever of its history, an attempt to impose such things upon the nation, if unfounded in fact, could possibly have succeeded.

The continuation of the Jewish History through a space of more than a thousand

years, is no less deserving of credit; the authority of those books in which it is contained being supported by abundant evidence. They were either composed by writers cotemporary with the events related, or were compiled not long afterwards from documents of unquestionable authority. Joshua continued the narrative of Moses to the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan under his own immediate guidance and government, and is entitled to credit as an eyewitness and principal agent in the transactions which he records. Samuel is generally considered as the author of the book of Judges; the events contained in which book were then so recent and of such great national importance, that, regarding him merely in the light of an ordinary Historian, we cannot suppose him to have been at any loss to ascertain their truth, or that he could have succeeded in imposing upon his countrymen any false or unauthenticated traditions. The same observations apply to the other historical books, and to such of the Prophetical Writings as contain matters of history. These continually refer to public documents and existing memorials of the events recorded, or relate them as facts of which they were themselves eyewitnesses. In chronological and genealogical reference they are



minutely circumstantial: and whoever duly considers the peculiar polity of the Jewish nation, and the interest which they had in taking care not to be deceived respecting the times, persons, and events, referred to in their national history, will perceive the impossibility of any narratives being admitted, which were not stamped with the clearest marks of authenticity.

For the further continuation of this history, during the last four hundred years of the Jewish dispensation, we depend upon the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament, the writings of Josephus, and profane historians of that age; which sufficiently assure us that the Jewish faith and ritual were still carefully and religiously preserved, and that the Scriptures on which they were founded could not possibly be a forgery of later ages.

But our proof of the certainty of those facts, which form the basis of the Christian and the Jewish Revelation, does not stop here. We are enabled to pursue it, through the history of the Patriarchal ages, even to the first annals of the human race.

In the book of Genesis is contained such a full though concise epitome of aboriginal history, as it seems impossible for any Impostor to have invented; since it refers to



several existing memorials of the occurrences which are recorded, and adverts to many circumstances both of time and place, which might easily have been disproved by those who were cotemporary with Moses, and which could not have obtained credit unless they had been supported by the most convincing evidence.

Unbelievers, indeed, continually represent the histories of the Patriarchs, and that of Abraham in particular, (being one of the most prominent in the book of Genesis,) as no more to be relied upon than the fabulous accounts of Bacchus, Hercules, and other Pagan heroes. But where will they find, in profane writers, a history of the reputed father of a people, attested like that of the Patriarch Abraham; with so many particulars related concerning him, and with reference made to his numerous posterity as living witnesses of the truth of the narrative? Could the twelve sons of Israel, from whom the Jewish nation directly sprang, be deceived as to their being the progeny of Abraham? Could Moses, whose grandfather was a son of one of the twelve, be uncertain as to his ancestry? Or could the Jewish nation be imposed upon in these particulars, who preserved their genealogies with singular care

and exactness, in order to ascertain the descent of every individual from the Patriarch of his Tribe? In short, does not the whole of the Jewish religion and polity, the laws of their inheritance, their traditions, institutions, and public monuments, demonstrate their proceeding from Abraham, and the truth of his history? And what evidence have gainsayers to produce to the contrary? Nothing that is deserving of a moment's consideration. Neither can they bring even a semblance of such proof in favour of those fabulous legends of Paganism, which they would fain put upon a level with our sacred records.

The still earlier parts of the Mosaic history, which record the dispersion at Babel, the re-peopling of the earth by the sons of Noah, the general Deluge, the Fall of Man, and the Creation of the world, appear to be as little liable to just exception. For, not to insist (in this stage of our inquiry) upon the just pretensions of Moses to Divine Inspiration, can it be doubted that there were in his time many existing memorials of these great events, in which the whole race of mankind was so deeply interested? We are expressly told, for instance, in this history, of the institution of the *Sabbath* as a perpetual ordinance to commemorate the work of *Crea-*

*tion.* We have also such intimations given of the institution of *Sacrifice* immediately after the *Fall*, as hardly leave us room to doubt that it was then ordained, to remind man of his lost condition, and to establish him in the faith and expectation of a *Redeemer*. Here then are *two* ordinances recorded, of especial importance in the religious history of the earliest ages of mankind; and the continued observance of these, to a much later period than any in which the Mosaic narrative could possibly have been written, as satisfactorily attests the truth of that narrative, as the Jewish ordinances and the Christian Sacraments have since borne witness to the certainty of the facts upon which *they* are respectively founded. As to the other great events, the Deluge, the re-peopling of the earth, and the dispersion of Babel, although no special institutions in commemoration of them are recorded, yet it can hardly be supposed that what the sacred Historian has related concerning them would ever have been received as true, had it not been confirmed either by existing memorials of unquestionable authenticity, or by such clear and well-founded tradition as might leave no room to doubt his knowledge and his veracity.

But to all this we have to add the very strong and remarkable testimony, which is borne by *Pagan* antiquity to the leading circumstances of Jewish and Patriarchal history preserved in the invaluable records of the Pentateuch. The Cosmogonies of the Heathen, their Deluges, their Sacrifices, their Oracles, their Heroes and Demi-Gods, their conjectures respecting the origin of nations and languages, all appear to have been derived from *this* source, or from *traditions* antecedent to the writings of Moses, authenticating with almost equal force the truth of his narrative.

Such is the strong and (we may venture to say) irrefragable evidence of the truth of the facts on which the credibility of Revealed Religion depends. To require more than a *moral* demonstration of such things, is unreasonable and perverse; since they do not, from their very nature, admit of metaphysical or mathematical proof. For, facts are of the nature of *first principles*, incapable of being made more clear or certain by any attempt at demonstration. Their proof depends, in the first instance, upon the evidence of the *Senses*, which, to those who are in possession of it, affords immediate and irresistible conviction. But to those who are

removed, by distance of time or place, from the possibility of *thus* judging of them, they can be proved only by *Testimony*; and no other proof can reasonably be sought. Facts of a marvellous or extraordinary kind may indeed require a greater *degree* of evidence to render them credible; but still they are *capable* of evidence; and sufficient evidence being given, it is irrational to refuse our assent to them. In the case of Revealed Religion, we contend that such an extraordinary degree of evidence *has* been afforded, as is fully proportioned to the nature of the facts to be proved; and, therefore, that every man is morally obliged to give credit to it, unless he can adduce some real *contradictory* evidence, by which it may be refuted, or, at least, rendered doubtful.

The Infidel has nothing to oppose to this body of historical testimony but vague conjectures or uncertain suspicions: nor can he rationally account for the *phenomena* which the general history of mankind presents to his view, without admitting the truth of the most remarkable facts contained in the Scripture Records. He may endeavour to shelter his incredulity under the pretended impossibility of coming to any *certain* knowledge of such ancient transactions; and he may



raise such a cloud of obscurities and doubts, upon almost every particular occurrence, as may prevent him from seeing it distinctly. But the argument for the truth of the *Scripture* History is of the same kind as that on which the truth of every *other* well-authenticated history depends; and arises from the manifest *absurdity* of supposing that it could ever have been received as true, if it were unfounded in fact. This absurdity, in a case of local or personal interest, in which we ourselves were directly concerned, would be instantly felt and acknowledged. What, for instance, should we think of a man who might resolve to disbelieve the whole history of *England*, or call in question the most remarkable occurrences, which have generally been received as true through a long series of generations, even those the remembrance of which is still kept up by public commemorations of the events; and who should even deny the existence of the whole code of jurisprudence, ecclesiastical and civil, by which the nation has constantly been governed? Should we not expect him to produce some *authentic documents*, contradictory of the received history? and should we not, *without these*, regard his sceptical objections as utterly irrelevant? A perverse caviller might

perhaps have ingenuity enough to cast an air of suspicion and improbability over the whole of *this* history, without adducing a single testimony to overthrow it ; as has often been done, or at least attempted, with the narratives of the *Bible*. But as no persons of sound understanding would give heed to him in the former case, so neither ought they in the latter.

Infinite mischief has, however, been done to the cause of Truth, by what is affectedly termed the *Philosophy of History*. Men of a sceptical turn of mind have, of late years, accustomed themselves to investigate the records of past times, not so much with a view to collect facts and to support or controvert them by competent authorities, as to reason, conjecture, and *philosophize*, as it is called, upon what they find narrated. Hence it often comes to pass, that facts which have been deemed for ages indisputable, are criticised as doubtful, or rejected as false, only because these fastidious speculatists do not perceive their abstract probability, or cannot account for them on what they call philosophical principles. Instances of this kind might be brought from the writings of men of admired talents, who have, in various kinds of history, endeavoured to falsify some of the best esta-

blished facts, because repugnant to their own views and principles. But it is on points of *religious* History that this spirit has chiefly prevailed, and produced the most serious evils. For where men set out with a pre-determination to support infidel opinions, and to doubt every thing irreconcilable with those opinions, how can any fair investigation of the facts be expected? If they will resolutely maintain that Miracles are impossible, that Prophecy is nothing but Enthusiasm or Imagination, and that the very notion of a Divine Revelation is absurd;—what will avail the strongest body of evidence that can be adduced? No pains will be spared to bring the whole into discredit, to falsify, ridicule, or perplex, every part of the narrative. History, however well-attested, will be decried as Fable, and treated with contempt.

It has, indeed, generally been one of the chief objects among Infidel Writers, to shake our belief in human testimony. But in so doing, they run counter to the common sentiments of mankind, as well as to the clear intentions of Providence, who hath ordained that we should chiefly depend upon this most extensive source of information, for the greater part of our knowledge, and especially for that which is essential to our well-being.

The foundation of our reliance on Testimony lies in the very nature and constitution of man. He who so framed us that our faculties are limited to certain narrow boundaries of time and space, evidently designed that we should mutually depend, in a great degree, upon the faculties of each other; that we should trust, in many cases, to the senses, the memory, and the understanding of others, exercised as we ourselves exercise such faculties, for the acquisition of knowledge. *The love of truth* also is, for the most part, so predominant an affection in the mind, that it can only be overcome by some powerful impulse of a contrary kind. Hence we deem it unreasonable to disbelieve the testimony of others, unless there appear some probable motive for misrepresentation. The general sentiment of mankind confirms this argument for the credibility of human testimony.

But when the Sceptic objects against Scripture History, that there can be no *certainty* of matters of fact done at so great a distance of time, his objections are founded on mere *suspicion*, not on proof or probability, and they strike at the root of history of *every* kind, as well as that of Revealed Religion. That there may be *sufficient* evidence of things done at the greatest distance of time

or place, is the grand *postulatum* on which all historical truth depends: and we can no more reason with a man who denies it, than with a man who rejects the evidence of his senses. For, why do we trust to *our own* senses, but that we believe that our Creator *intended* we should trust to them, and will not suffer us to be misled by them, in any matter of importance, if we are careful to exercise them aright? And similar reason we have to trust to the senses of *others*, if there are no just grounds to impeach either their veracity, or their capability of discernment.

With regard to *Scripture* History, there is no good reason to suspect its being otherwise than a true and faithful narrative. For, what is it that gives just grounds of suspicion concerning human testimony? It is, that the narrators appear to be men of artifice and cunning, who make no conscience of relating falsehood when it may conduce to their advantage;—that they evidently study to adapt their doctrine to the corrupt dispositions of those on whom they would prevail;—that they lay the scene of the transactions in some obscure or distant place, or so remotely from their own times, as to make it impossible to produce proper testimony of what they relate;—that their narrative has something in it



manifestly repugnant to other authentic histories of those times ;—or that there are evident contradictions in the history itself. But none of these grounds of suspicion attach to the writings in question. Their authors gave the most unequivocal proofs of sincerity. They asserted either what they saw themselves, or what they proved by existing documents and memorials of unimpeached authority. They testified at, or near to, the times in which the events took place. They narrated the facts in the plainest and simplest manner. Their testimony was not that of a single witness, but of many. And they exposed themselves to the greatest dangers and sufferings, nay to death itself, rather than retract what they had asserted. What other history is supported by evidence like this?

“But,” says the Unbeliever, “nothing is so  
“easy as to be deceived in matters of *Reli-*  
“*gion* ; *all* Religions being founded on writ-  
“ings or traditions of a similar kind, on the  
“authority of some particular men, and on  
“their pretences to Inspiration, for which we  
“have no proof but their own assertion : and  
“since persons of contrary Religions treat  
“each other’s opinions as false and ridi-

“culous, *Philosophers* will regard them *all* as “equally Impostures.”

The obvious answer to such flippant reasoning, is, that, under such circumstances, it behoves us carefully to *examine* these different pretensions, that we may discover which of them are well-founded, and which are not. This is surely more *rational*, than to reject them all without discrimination. For, does it follow, that because there are many writings and traditions full of error and falsehood, therefore there are none true? or that because there have been many impostors and enthusiasts pretending to Divine authority without sufficient proofs, therefore those persons are not to be believed who bring proofs the most decisive of the validity of their pretensions? What is this but saying, that because the world abounds with knaves and hypocrites, therefore there are no honest men? or that truth and falsehood cannot be distinguished from each other? Wherein does the Unbeliever, who thus argues, differ in point of wisdom and discernment from the blindest and most ignorant bigot whom he makes the object of his sport and ridicule? Yet is this mode of arguing perpetually resorted to in the most popular works of infidel

Writers. They endeavour to prejudice their readers against any *inquiry* into the evidences of Revealed Religion, by confounding things *miraculous* with things *fabulous*; and they would thence persuade us, that they who believe the Gospel or the Pentateuch, may as well believe the Koran or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

But, when a graver style of reasoning is to be assumed, it is asserted that "facts can never be established with perfect certainty, unless it were impossible that men should lie or be deceived; and that only *metaphysical* or *mathematical* truths are incontestable."

That facts are not capable of mathematical or metaphysical demonstration, we readily acknowledge. But we contend, that they do not *require* such demonstration; and that they can never be *disproved* by any reasoning of such a kind. We insist also, that facts *may* be certainly true, although it is possible that men *may* lie or be deceived. The question is, therefore, are such and such facts true? or have such and such men lied and been deceived? and these questions admit of a satisfactory solution, though not upon mathematical or metaphysical principles, since these are not the proper criteria of historical

truth. General abstract assertions, that men may deceive others or be themselves deceived, will never prove that any particular history is false, nor invalidate the force of its evidence, in the judgment of persons capable of discerning between truth and error. The only rational mode of proceeding is to examine the evidence itself, and see whether it will abide the scrutiny to which all human testimony ought to submit.

If we thus consider and compare the different Religions which have appeared in the world, we shall be at no loss to distinguish between the truth and falsehood of their respective pretensions. For example, what foundation had the ancient Heathen Mythology? It had a Priesthood, Temples, Rites and Ceremonies without number. But who ever pretended to prove that its institutions were founded on real matters of fact, and commenced at the date of those events which they were designed to commemorate? Nothing of this kind was ever done or attempted by the votaries of Paganism; who well knew that it was impossible to produce any thing like authentic history in support of its ridiculous fables. In this respect there is no resemblance between Paganism and Christianity, the latter of which grounds its claims

to our acceptance on a series of transactions evident to the senses of mankind, recorded by cotemporary writers of unimpeached credit, and accompanied with peculiar ordinances and institutions commencing with the transactions, and observed in memorial of them through all succeeding generations. No contrast can be more striking, or better enable us to form a judgment respecting the comparative credibility of the systems.

Compare, in like manner, the Religion of *Mahomet* with that of Jesus or of Moses. Throughout the Koran where shall we find any positive evidence, on which the pretensions of Mahomet are founded? Where is there any appeal to living witnesses, or any thing confirmed by the testimony of other writers? The existence of Mahomet and the propagation of his Religion are, indeed, as unquestionable as the existence of Jesus and the propagation of the Gospel. But among the thousands and ten thousands who have perished in defence of Mahometanism, not one can properly be said to have died in attestation of any authenticated facts, on which the divine mission of its Founder could be established. Here, therefore, is a case as distinct as possible from that of the Christian Religion. Mahomet "bare witness



“ of himself,” and had no other witnesses to confirm his testimony ; neither did his pretensions undergo any public investigation. Christianity was professed by multitudes who died in confirmation of its facts, which were of the most public notoriety, and were jealously scrutinized by an inquisitive and unbelieving age.

The same observations which apply to Paganism and Mahometanism, are applicable to every other pretended Revelation from the beginning of the world. Hence we may conclude it to be impossible that any false Religion should bear a strict investigation of its origin. Yet every false Religion undesignedly bears witness to that which is true, while it betrays its own defectiveness of proof. Even the bitterest enemies of Christianity, who lived nearest the time of its promulgation, admitted the *facts* on which it rests, as too evident to be called in question. Julian (the idol of modern Infidelity) admitted them : so did Celsus : and so did Porphyry. Whatever may have been the perverseness or prejudice which led these men to deny the proper inferences to be drawn from them, still they have admitted the certainty of the Christian history ; and we accept them as witnesses (*reluctant* witnesses, indeed,) to the

truth, though we despise them as reasoners, and abhor them as blasphemers and apostates.

Here, then, we may close this part of our inquiry, the object of which has been to shew that believers in the Holy Scriptures do not “follow cunningly-devised fables,” but rely upon the testimony of those who were “eye-witnesses” of what they related, and who gave such proofs of competency in their evidence, and of veracity in their assertions, as it were infatuation to disbelieve.

Having laid this foundation, we are next to consider the peculiar nature and circumstances of the facts thus recorded, in order to ascertain *by what agency* they were effected, and whether they do not carry in them evidence of a *Divine* interposition. For, if the Apostles and Prophets are to be credited as *Historians*, it will most assuredly be found that they are entitled to credit in a much higher character, even as *Messengers of the Most High*. But since it is our first concern to be assured of their veracity as men ; let them undergo the strictest scrutiny in this respect that any reasonable person can desire, and they will come forth as gold which is “purified seven times in the fire.” Such indeed is the confidence with which

we may rely on their testimony, that though our Lord might well say to those who were personally attendant on his ministry, “Bless-  
“ed are your eyes, for they see; and your  
“ears, for they hear<sup>b</sup> ;” yet may we now no less justly apply to ourselves that other benediction, “Blessed are they that have not  
“seen, and yet have believed<sup>c</sup> !”

<sup>b</sup> Matt. xiii. 16.

<sup>c</sup> John xx. 29.

## SERMON XX.

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1 JOHN v. 9.

*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.*

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It is here intimated by the Apostle, that for our confirmation in the Christian Faith we have *Divine* as well as *human* testimony: and he argues, that if we receive the one, (which, as reasonable beings, he supposes we must do,) much more ought we to receive the other, which, from the very nature of it, cannot but be infallible. We are here, therefore, directed to turn our attention to the proofs that the Christian Revelation is attested by sufficient evidence of its Divine original.

This inquiry presupposes that the truth of the history in which this Revelation is contained is already established by competent human testimony to the *facts* which it narrates; since unless the witnesses who bore

testimony to those facts were entitled to credit, and their writings were genuine and authentic, the whole system would be deprived of its foundation. Several considerations have been already urged to evince that these witnesses, and the records transmitted to us by them of the history of Revealed Religion from the earliest periods of time, are (upon every consideration which can influence reasonable and unprejudiced minds) deserving of our fullest and most unreserved acceptance. Until the evidences on which these arguments are founded can be overthrown by positive and unexceptionable authorities to the contrary, we may regard this part of our subject as placed beyond the reach of controversy. It now remains to shew, that in the facts thus recorded and authenticated are also contained decisive proofs of *more than human* testimony to the truth of the Revelation itself; or (as the Apostle expresses it) that it has “the witness of God.”

The main argument to prove that a Religion is supported by *Divine testimony*, is, the impossibility of accounting for it by any thing less than the *extraordinary* interposition of the Supreme Being. *All* the events which happen in the world may indeed be said, in a larger sense, to proceed from God ;



because all things are conducted by His superintending Providence, and nothing can be brought to pass without His *permission*. But when we speak of “the *witness* of God” as given to any particular system, we mean that it is accompanied with some clear and manifest *tokens* of His *intention* that we should believe it to come from Him: and the only question that arises, is, whether such tokens have been given as afford *sufficient* indications of that intention?

The gifts of *Miracles*, *Prophecy*, and *Inspiration*, wherever they are clearly proved, have generally been considered as indubitable evidences of Divine interposition; because these, being contrary to the ordinary course of God’s Providence, shew the intention of the Almighty to convince his creatures that what is thus attested is sanctioned by *His* authority. To these evidences the several dispensations of Revealed Religion recorded in the Holy Scriptures make direct pretensions. Of the validity of these pretensions, as well as of their sufficiency, if valid, to establish the point in question, it is intended hereafter to enter into a detailed consideration.

But, independently of these *particular* evidences, there is one *general* argument of a

most forcible and convincing kind, arising from the nature and circumstances of the case, which prove that such a system as that revealed in Holy Writ could not possibly have been planned or executed, but by Knowledge and Power incapable of limitation or control.

To give this argument its full force, it will be necessary to consider, first, the nature of the *design*, manifested throughout the several dispensations of Revealed Religion;—secondly, the *means* employed for carrying it into effect;—thirdly, its *accomplishment* “in the fulness of time;”—and lastly, its *continuance* in after-ages.

1. First, let us consider the nature of the *design*.

The Scripture History commences with the Creation of the world, and is brought down to the birth of Christ. During this vast space of time, we perceive one grand object constantly kept in view, declared to be the purpose of the Almighty from the beginning, and which, notwithstanding the fluctuating changes of human affairs, should ultimately be brought to pass. This object, *the Salvation of mankind*, is the master-key which unlocks every part of Scripture. Let it then, for a moment, be considered, how

improbable, or rather how impossible it is, that any *human* imagination should conceive a plan like this.

To devise *any* scheme of Salvation, properly so called, is a task (as we have already endeavoured to prove) far beyond the ability of man. The advocates for Natural Religion may speculate as they please upon the efficacy of any Atonement which sinful men can offer to their offended Creator : but they can find none which may reasonably be considered as sufficient. “It costs more,” than any thing which man can provide, to “deliver his brother,” or to “redeem his own soul ; so that “he must let that alone for ever<sup>a</sup>.” To recover the lost favour of God must be, exclusively, the work of God himself, to whom only it appertaineth to dictate the terms on which the offender shall be accepted. But on this point it is needless to enlarge any farther. What we are now to prove, is the impossibility that *such* a scheme as that of the Christian Redemption should be of human contrivance.

In this astonishing work we see a design projected, the completion of which was not to take place till many ages after its commencement, and which was to be carried on

<sup>a</sup> Ps. xlix. 7, 8.

by persons remote from and unconnected with each other, of dissimilar habits and conditions of life, with no worldly motives for prosecuting such an undertaking, and dependent upon all the contingencies of human events for its ultimate success. Here is something altogether extraordinary and wonderful, in the very conception of the plan, something entirely out of the common course of human invention; and he who can attribute the formation of it to the ingenuity and foresight of man, might, with almost equal reason, contend for the formation of the Universe by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, and make Chance the object of his worship.

This argument for the Divine origin of the Christian scheme, drawn from the nature of the design, appears to be so conclusive, that no objections to detached parts of the system can be of material weight against it: and did we but accustom ourselves to regard the several dispensations of Revealed Religion as displaying, throughout, a perfect *uniformity* of plan, (since all are conducted with the same views, and tend to the same object,) we could hardly fail of considering this as a proof irresistible of its proceeding from God.

But Infidels almost always shew a disposition to examine its evidences separately,

rather than in a collective point of view. Hence they see nothing in it but a mass of improbabilities, without order, beauty, or design; and may be compared to children, who having taken to pieces some curious work of machinery, are unable to put it together again, or to discern its use, and then throw it away as worthless and contemptible.

From such an imperfect investigation it is indeed impossible to do justice to the subject. Neither is it thus that men of reputation for wisdom or integrity are wont to act, in forming a judgment upon any *other* matter, though of far inferior importance to this. Who, in a court of human judicature, would take upon him to decide from the abstract probability of this or that portion of the testimony, without considering the *sum* of the evidence produced, and the mutual connection of its several particulars? Or who, in the examination of a great system of Natural Philosophy, or of Civil Polity and Jurisprudence, would be qualified to appreciate its merits, from viewing only some detached parts of the subject? How presumptuous, then, must be the attempt to judge of that prodigious design which the Scriptures reveal to us, without contemplating it on the most extended scale, as a work, of which no adequate idea can be formed,



unless its various evidences be brought together, and considered as united with and dependent on each other?

We may be bold to say, that no person who *thus* considers it can reasonably doubt that it is the work of Supreme Wisdom and Power. For who but the Omniscient and Omnipotent Disposer of all things could arrange, conduct, or even conceive, a design like this? Or what but the Infinite Mind, to which “one day is as a thousand years, and a “thousand years as one day<sup>b</sup>,” could grasp a subject extending from age to age, and from generation to generation? Let them who contend for its being of *man’s* device, produce any work acknowledged to be of *human* original, which can be put in competition with this. Sages, Heroes, Legislators, the wisest, the most powerful, or the most ambitious of mankind, never formed a project to be executed by persons yet unborn, by means not yet in existence, and even in the remotest ages of futurity. Founders of empires, and fabricators of false Religions, usually have their own aggrandizement, or their own celebrity, foremost in consideration. But here we have (on the supposition that Christianity with all its introductory dispensations, was

<sup>b</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 8.

only a human device or “cunningly-devised “fable”) an instance of a strange and unaccountable design, planned many ages before its accomplishment, and carried on with undeviating perseverance to the attainment of its object, in defiance of numberless discouragements, and without any inducement of worldly honour or advantage. Let not Infidels upbraid the friends of Revealed Religion with *credulity*, if they themselves can give credit to an hypothesis so imaginary and extravagant !

2. But the argument in favour of Revelation from the nature of the *design*, will be greatly strengthened by considering, in the next place, the *means* employed for carrying it into effect.

It is the exclusive prerogative of the Almighty, to overrule human actions so as to render them subservient to His purposes, without destroying man’s free agency ; and to bring His counsels to pass by the instrumentality of those who are oftentimes not only unconscious of doing so, but are even labouring to defeat His designs. This is what no *human* power can possibly effect. Now, in the history of Revealed Religion, we shall find that wonderful variety as to the mode of conducting its several dispensations,

which can only be ascribed to the direct operation of God's Providence, making all things work together for the accomplishment of His Will, however unpromising and even hostile in their appearance.

“God,” says the Apostle to the Hebrews, “who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son<sup>c</sup>.” The first promise of a Redeemer made to Adam was the basis of the whole system : and we cannot but be forcibly struck with the correspondence of all the subsequent events to the specific purpose therein declared. In remembrance of this promise, especial ordinances were appointed ; and a way was prepared for its fulfilment, by the selection of certain families and individuals, through whom it should be conveyed to posterity ; and also by the signal punishment of those who strove to make it of none effect. The institution of Sacrifice, the separation of Seth's posterity from that of Cain, the destruction of the whole human race (one family alone excepted) by the general Deluge, the renewal of the covenant with Noah, the dispersion at Babel, and the calling of Abraham, were all circumstances directly con-

<sup>c</sup> Heb. i. 1, 2.

ducive to the great end proposed, yet not to be attributed to any human foresight or contrivance. These were among the means adopted in the infancy of the world, in the Patriarchal Ages.

In times subsequent to these, we find upon record a long series of events equally inexplicable on principles of human policy or sagacity, yet equally forwarding the declared purpose. The sojourning of the Israelites in Egypt, their deliverance by Moses, their separation from the rest of mankind, their statutes and ordinances evidently typical of the promised Redeemer, the chain of Prophecies continued throughout the Jewish Dispensation till within four hundred years of the coming of Christ, and the extraordinary manifestations of God's providence in the preservation of this people, under a variety of difficulties, and in opposition to the most powerful and inveterate enemies, afford proofs of the continual progress and furtherance of the original plan, which it seems impossible to consider as the result of accident, or the mere ordinary course of worldly affairs.

In the mean while, the Heathen world, though described, comparatively, as "sitting  
" in darkness and in the shadow of death<sup>d</sup>,"

<sup>d</sup> Luke i. 79.

were not entirely unapprised of the blessing which was thus preparing for them. The Patriarchs (it has already been observed) were “preachers of righteousness” to the Gentiles, even before the Mosaic economy took place. The Jewish history and religion were not unknown among the neighbouring nations; and by the captivities and dispersions of Israel and Judah they were more and more diffused in distant countries. Of these tradition conveyed some memorials, however faint and obscure, to succeeding ages; so that towards the time of our Lord’s appearing, a general expectation prevailed of Him who was emphatically predicted to be “the desire of *all* nations,” no less than “the hope of Israel.”

How shall we account for so vast a design as this, announced from the very beginning, carried on without interruption through such a series of ages, and prosecuted by means so various and complicated, yet so manifestly tending to the same point? Can any satisfactory answer be given, but that which may be expressed in the words of the Psalmist, “This is the LORD’s doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes<sup>c</sup>?” We contend, that in the astonishing coincidence of the several parts of this

<sup>c</sup> Ps. cxviii. 23.



system the power and wisdom of God were eminently displayed. We ask, moreover, is such evidence of supernatural conduct and design to be found in any *other* Religion that was ever offered to mankind ? In the mythologies of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and in the fantastical legends of India, China, or Japan, we find many fragments of Scripture history, blended with fictions of the most extravagant kind; but nothing solid and coherent, nothing which indicates one superintending and controlling mind, pervading the whole. In the religion of Mahomet, there were no clear proofs of antiquity, no preparatory dispensations to introduce or establish the claims of its upstart Founder, no connection or consistency in the system itself, nor any external evidences of supernatural power which gave it the appearance of being the production of a Divine Author. The Bible alone contains a clear, uniform, and harmonious plan; the several parts of which are so connected as not only to evince a preconceived design, but also to require, from the very nature of that design, an all-commanding and resistless power to effect its accomplishment.

But, however convincing this argument may appear, to such as are disposed to allow it its proper weight, the perverseness of the

Unbeliever will endeavour to weaken its force, by a variety of captious objections. He will contend, that the means used in carrying on this design are, in many instances, irreconcilable with our notions of wisdom and expediency, and therefore such as it were unbecoming to attribute to the Divine counsels. Does it not, he will say, for instance, appear, that Moses, in conducting the Israelites from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan, led them into many unnecessary difficulties, and obliged them to suffer hardships and troubles to which no man of common prudence would have exposed them? Were not also the laws and ordinances, which he laid upon this people, confessedly too grievous to be borne? How, then, can we ascribe such conduct to a God of infinite wisdom? Again; did not Jesus, by opposing the expectations of the Jews, obstruct his own designs, and preclude them from receiving him as the Messiah? Did not the Apostles also, by their inflexible opposition to Jewish and Gentile prejudices, throw obstacles in the way of the Gospel, and occasion it to be considered as an offence and a reproach? Can such proceedings be considered as the result of Divine agency, without derogating from the perfections of the Supreme Being?

Objections of this kind are familiar to all who are conversant with infidel Writers. But they only serve to remind us of fresh arguments, in proof of the point for which we are now contending. For, what more convincing testimony can we desire, of a *Divine* power conducting this mighty work, than that the means by which it was carried on were, *humanly* speaking, *inadequate* to the end ; nay, even contrary, in several instances, to what would have been suggested by human policy and wisdom ? St. Paul meets this objection of Unbelievers in its full force, and turns it against them with irresistible effect. “ God,” says he, “ hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; “ and hath chosen the weak things of the “ world to confound the things that are “ mighty<sup>f</sup>.” This argument is equally applicable both to the *persons* and the *measures*, by which the Divine purpose is effected. “ Known unto God are all his works from “ the beginning of the world<sup>g</sup>.” “ Whatsoever “ pleaseth him, that doeth he, whether in “ heaven or in earth.” All means, therefore, are alike in his hands: and he never so clearly and indubitably manifests his superintending and controlling power, as when he accom-

<sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. i. 27.

<sup>g</sup> Acts xv. 18.

plishes his purpose by instruments and methods, which, to us, appear least conducive to its attainment.

Upon this ground it is, that we build one of the most solid arguments for the Divine origin both of the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations ; neither of which we can suppose would have succeeded, according to the methods by which they were conducted, had they been of mere human invention, or left to mere human guidance. In the case of Moses, this has been very convincingly proved, by a late writer of distinguished learning and ability<sup>h</sup>, who urges as an unanswerable argument for the Divine mission of Moses, that the system he pursued was such “as no man could have formed, much less have carried on, in the manner by which we see it at last completed ; the process being oftentimes contrary to *human* prudence, though consonant to Divine wisdom.” He also points out, that, “as the process was in many instances contrary to human prudence, so the difficulties with which it was attended could not have been remedied by the wisdom of man. Hence the Divine assistance was throughout indispensably necessary.” By

<sup>h</sup> See Bryant’s Observations on the Plagues of Egypt, Part IV. page 193, &c.

a similar mode of argument, the history of our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles has been often shewn to afford incontrovertible proofs of Divine agency in the transactions recorded; since neither human wisdom would have suggested the means resorted to, nor would human power ever have been able to execute, by those means, a design, in which every thing was to be conducted upon principles repugnant to worldly policy, and irreconcilable with those views and motives which usually actuate mankind. Both the conception and the conduct of the plan can, therefore, only be ascribed to the counsels and the operation of Him, who is able to “destroy the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent<sup>i</sup>.”

3. Thus does the nature of the *design*, and of the *means* employed for carrying it into effect, clearly indicate the Divine origin of the several dispensations of Revealed Religion. Let us next consider what additional force this argument may derive, from the *accomplishment* of such an extraordinary design, “in the fulness of time.”

It has been often urged against the Christian Revelation, that if it be necessary for

<sup>i</sup> I Cor. i. 19.



the salvation of mankind, it ought to have taken place at a much earlier period ; since otherwise we must suppose God to have been unmindful of the exigencies of his creatures in preceding ages, or indisposed to afford them necessary aid and instruction. But this objection, so far as the Divine attributes are concerned in it, may be easily repelled. For (not to insist on the general and irrefragable truth, that “the Judge of all the earth will “do right,” and, that, whether we can discern, or not, the *reason* of his proceedings, we may be assured that they are founded in wisdom and goodness) the argument is of no weight, unless it could be proved that mankind were kept in entire ignorance of the great scheme of salvation from the time of Adam to the coming of Christ, and also that, if ignorant of it, they must necessarily be deprived of any share in its benefits :—neither of which positions is capable of proof.

In the first place, a very considerable measure of information concerning this gracious design was bestowed upon mankind long before its accomplishment, nay, even from the beginning of the world. St. Paul speaks of the Patriarchs as “all dying in Faith, not “having received the promises, but having “seen them afar off, and were persuaded of

“ them, and embraced them<sup>k</sup>.” Sufficient light, therefore, must have been imparted in the *earliest* ages of mankind to have rendered those inexcusable by whom it was disregarded; and although the darkness of the Heathen world in *after* times was very great, (so great as to be called a “gross darkness,” which “covered the people<sup>l</sup>,”) yet it must be remembered that this darkness appears to have been at first judicially inflicted upon those who apostatized from the faith, and who “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil;” and that by the continuance of it men were at length made sensible of their want of light, and more willing to accept the blessing of Revelation, when it was offered to them.

In the next place, it is to be observed, that although a very great portion of mankind, in the times preceding the Christian Dispensation, were comparatively ignorant of Revealed Religion, and of the great work of Redemption then carrying on, yet it will by no means follow, that they could have no participation in its benefits. The Scripture solves this difficulty, by declaring Jesus Christ to have been “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world<sup>m</sup>;” slain, that

<sup>k</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

<sup>l</sup> Isaiah lx. 2.

<sup>m</sup> Rev. xiii. 8.

is, in the Divine purpose, for the Redemption of all mankind. Here the *retrospective* effects of this Great Sacrifice appear to be clearly pointed out. It may be presumed, therefore, that, for the sake of Christ, and through his all-prevailing merits, many who in the times of Heathen ignorance strove to live suitably to that imperfect degree of knowledge which they possessed, will finally be accepted of God. Every notion of the Divine goodness or justice which we can form leads us to believe, that, whether the knowledge of His Will and of the means of Grace and Salvation be more or less clearly revealed, He will acquit or condemn mankind according to their use or abuse of the degree of information vouchsafed to them: so that they who under the Gospel dispensation have gathered much, will have nothing over; and they who under the preceding dispensations gathered little, will lack nothing of their final reward.

But not to dwell longer upon difficulties, which, for the most part, are created by presumptuous cavillers, we may proceed to observe, that the delay of the completion of this great design to a time so far distant from the first intimation of it, affords in itself a corroborative evidence that the system is

*Divine*; since no effort of human sagacity, no combination of human talents, can be supposed competent to the formation and arrangement of so extensive and (according to the objection of our adversaries) so *protracted* an undertaking. Every argument with which unbelievers here assail us, in order to prove that this could not be the work of God, may be urged with tenfold force against themselves, who regard it as the work of *man*. For if (as has already been maintained) it could hardly have entered into the heart of man to *conceive* a plan like this, so many ages before its execution, how much less can its *completion*, under such a variety of discouragements, with instruments so weak, and by means apparently so precarious and insufficient, be deemed the result of human contrivance?

But to shew in a still more striking manner how weak and ill-founded are the common objections on this head, many important considerations have been suggested by learned Writers, proving that the *time*, in which the Redemption of mankind received its completion in the person of our Blessed Saviour, (and which St. Paul emphatically calls “the fulness of time,”) was precisely that which was most evidently calculated to pro-



duce its intended effect upon mankind. But we need not be very solicitous to detail these arguments, when we reflect that all questions relative to the counsels of the Almighty, “whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts,” savour too much of arrogance and presumption to deserve particular consideration. For, after all, if there be *other* proofs, good and valid, of the *Divine* origin of Revelation, what answer need be given to those who take upon them to impeach the wisdom and expediency of the time, or the mode, in which it was communicated to mankind?

4. But in addition to these proofs that Christianity, from its preparatory dispensations, and from its completion at the appointed time, must have been the work of God, we are now to consider, lastly, the no less extraordinary circumstance of its *pro-vagation* and *continuance* in after-times.

Two points of chief importance here present themselves to our consideration.

The first is, the apparent incompetency of the earliest preachers of the Gospel, to carry on the design, without the especial presence and power of God. So far as relates to the Apostles themselves, (with the single exception of St. Paul,) it seems beyond all dis-



pute, that less hopeful advocates of any cause, in point of learning, education, rank, or personal influence of whatever kind, could not have been selected. In the succeeding ages, many persons of distinguished talents and acquirements did, indeed, come forward in its support, and with the weapons of learning and science, baffled its most subtle opponents. But how came *these* persons to be first converted, by what the wise disputers of the world stigmatized as “the foolishness of preaching?” Or how can the extraordinary success of the fishermen of Galilee and the tent-maker of Tarsus, in overcoming the haughty and stubborn prejudices of both Jews and Greeks, be accounted for, but by the Divine power which accompanied their labours, or (what amounts to the same thing with respect to the present argument) the irresistible force of those evidences to the truth of the Gospel, which were daily urged upon their hearers?

The other point, no less deserving of consideration, is this :—That Christianity, during the three first centuries in which it was preached to the world, was assailed by such violent and unremitting hostility, as must, to all human appearance, have effected its utter destruction, had it not been upholden

by more than mortal power ; and that, since that time, it has frequently sustained the severest shocks, and been constantly exposed to the attacks of secret as well as of open foes. No other instance can be produced in the annals of mankind, of a system which has thus withstood a continued combination of power, ingenuity, and malice, to work its overthrow. In vain will infidels search for a parallel case to this. *Paganism* fell instantly, when the secular arm was raised against it. *Mahometanism* has never stood the trial, except in some few parts of Europe, from which it was blown away, as easily as Paganism had been, by the storm of Persecution. Christianity alone survived every effort to destroy it ; and still survives, notwithstanding the tremendous conspiracy, in very recent times, to extirpate it from the very heart of Christendom.

When we consider these indisputable facts, and observe also that this success of the Gospel, wonderful and inexplicable as it is by any human means, was effected in pursuance of a *declared purpose*, announced in the earliest ages of mankind, and from time to time renewed and republished in a still more explicit manner, in order to keep up the attention of mankind, and incite them to watch

and observe the progress of the design, under all the vicissitudes of events with which it had to contend ;—can we hesitate to pronounce, that God himself bore witness to it, in every stage of the proceeding? Having seen the Divine word *pledged*, in the first instance, for its support, and that pledge to this very hour *fulfilled* ; is it not something worse than Scepticism, to doubt its heavenly origin ?

Here, then, we may close our inquiries into the great *general* argument for the Divine authority of the Christian Revelation, founded on the nature and circumstances of the case, which shew that it could neither have been planned nor executed but by an all-discerning and all-powerful Being ; and that many of the most popular objections against it arise from partial and narrow views of the subject. Its vast extent from the beginning to the end of time, and from one end of the earth to the other ; its perfect unity of design ; the harmony and consistency of its several dispensations ; the wonderful variety of means, and the apparent inadequacy of the instruments, employed for carrying it into effect ; its completion, nevertheless, at the appointed time ; and its preservation ever since, under innumerable perils and dif-

ficulties ;—will be proofs convincing, to every sound and unprejudiced mind, that it came from God.

Thus, antecedently to any particular examination of Miracles, Prophecy, and Inspiration, (those great bulwarks of our Faith which remain yet to be considered,) we are furnished with a body of strong and irrefragable evidence, justly to be regarded as the testimony of God himself, to the truth of the Christian Religion. Let us remember, then, that “if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” Since human and Divine testimony appear, even from the view already taken of it, thus jointly to uphold the truth of this prodigious work ; let us be prepared to investigate its further proofs with reverential attention. For, however the folly or conceit of vain Philosophy may incline some to disregard or despise such manifest tokens of Divine agency, we may justly say, as the Psalmist said respecting God’s wonders in old time, “Whoso is wise will ponder these things, and they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord<sup>n</sup>.”

<sup>n</sup> Ps. cvii. 43.

## SERMON XXI.

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JOHN iii. 2.

*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

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IF every man would reason as Nicodemus here does, on the sufficiency of well-attested *Miracles* to establish a Divine Mission; there would be little difficulty in proving the Christian Religion to be the work of God. The connection between Doctrines and Miracles is not even questioned by this “master “in Israel;” but is assumed as a point incontrovertible. “Rabbi, we *know* that thou “art a teacher come from God: FOR, no man “can do these Miracles that thou doest, “except God be with him.” He comes, therefore, with an earnest desire to be instructed in the doctrine of this heavenly Teacher, as to one whose Divine authority could not be disputed.



It appears, however, that among his brethren, the Jewish Rulers, few, if any, reasoned in the same manner; or, at least, had the honesty and courage to avow that they did so. On the contrary, they were unceasingly employed in endeavouring to weaken among the people the impression made by his wonderful works. They accused him of performing these works through the power of Beelzebub. They called upon him for “a sign from heaven,” as if his miracles were not a sufficient attestation that God was with him. They resisted likewise the doctrine of his Apostles, even at the very time when they confessed that “a notable miracle had indeed “been wrought by them;” and, in every instance, were ready to revile as blasphemers those who certified their authority to preach the religion of Jesus, by the wonders which they wrought in his name.

Nor was this conduct peculiar either to the Jewish nation, or to the first ages of the Gospel. The heathen were equally ready in ascribing the Christian Miracles to magic and to evil spirits, and equally indisposed to admit them as valid proofs of a commission from Heaven to instruct mankind. This is evident from the kind of reasoning in vindication of those Miracles with which the writ-

ings of the early fathers of the Church abound ; and also from those fragments of Celsus, Julian, and other adversaries of the Faith, which have been handed down to us. But in all these, as well as in the attacks of Jewish Unbelievers upon our Lord and his Apostles, it is remarkable that no doubt is intimated of the *reality* of the Miracles themselves ; which are invariably regarded as facts indisputable, and confessedly beyond the power of human agency.

It might justly have been expected, that the boasted improvements of modern times in reasoning and philosophy, would have led men to perceive the futility of such cavils as these. But, unhappily for the cause of truth, Infidelity has ever been watchful to avail itself of the circumstances of the times, whether more or less enlightened : so that whenever a clearer and better knowledge of the subject enables men to correct former opinions hostile to religious truth, ingenuity is soon at work to substitute others, not so gross, perhaps, but equally false and mischievous. In no instance has this been more apparent, than in the different manner in which the credibility of *Miracles* has been attacked by ancient and modern adversaries ; and it might afford a curious history of the

perverseness of the human mind, to detail the many inconsistencies and contradictions to be found among Infidel Writers, in treating of this important subject.

But, without entering into such a particular inquiry, the general objections of modern writers against Miracles may be reduced to two kinds: first, their absolute *impossibility*; secondly, their *insufficiency* for the end proposed. These are objections *in limine*, which it is necessary to remove, before we proceed to the consideration of any miracles of a particular description.

The arguments most usually brought to prove Miracles to be *impossible*, relate rather to their *moral* than their *physical* impossibility; and turn chiefly upon their supposed repugnancy to the Divine attributes of immutability and truth. In modern times, however, a bolder undertaking has been essayed, that of demonstrating their absolute physical impossibility; or, at least, the impossibility of their being proved as matters of fact.

In support of the assertion, that no “testimony for any kind of Miracle can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof,” it has been argued thus: that Miracles, being contrary to general experi-

ence, are incapable of proof, and, being likewise contrary to the established laws of Nature, imply in the very character of them a palpable contradiction.

The Essayist<sup>a</sup>, who has most elaborately drawn out this argument, perplexes the subject by attempting to adjust, in a sort of metaphysical balance of his own invention, the degrees of probability resulting from what he is pleased to call *opposite experiences*; the experience of men's veracity, on the one hand, and the experience of the firm and unalterable constitution of the laws of Nature, on the other. But the fallacy in this mode of reasoning is obvious. For, in the first place, Miracles can, at most, only be contrary to the experience of those who never saw them performed:—to say therefore that they are contrary to *general* experience, (including, as it should seem, the experience even of those who profess to have seen and to have examined them,) is to assume the very point in question. And in the next place, it is equally fallacious to allege against them the experience of the unalterable constitution of the laws of Nature; because, until the point be previously determined whether those laws have ever been altered or

<sup>a</sup> Hume. Essay on Miracles.

suspended, this is likewise merely a gratuitous assumption.

In truth, this boasted balance of probabilities could not be employed with effect in the cause of Infidelity, but by counterpoising against the testimony of those who profess to have *seen* Miracles, the testimony of those (if any such were to be found) who, under the same circumstances, and with the same opportunities of forming a judgment, professed to have been convinced that the things which they saw were *not* Miracles, but mere impostures and delusions. Here would be indeed experience against experience : and a Sceptic might be well employed in estimating the comparative weight of the testimony on either side ; in order to judge of the credibility or incredibility of the things proposed to his belief. But when he weighs only the experience of those to whom the opportunity of judging of a Miracle by personal observation has never been afforded, against the experience of those who declare themselves to have been eyewitnesses of the fact ; instead of *opposite experiences*, properly so called, he is only balancing total *inexperience*, on the one hand, against positive *experience*, on the other.

Nor will it avail any thing, to say that this



particular inexperience of those who have never seen Miracles is compensated by their general experience of the *unalterable* course of Nature. For, as we have already observed, this is altogether a mere *petitio principii*. It is arguing upon a supposition, wholly incapable of proof, that the course of Nature *is* indeed so *unalterably* fixed, that even God himself, by whom its laws were ordained, *cannot*, when he sees fit, suspend their operation.

There is therefore a palpable fallacy (however a subtle Metaphysician may attempt to disguise it by ingenious sophistry) in representing the *experience* of mankind as being *opposite* to the testimony on which our belief in Miracles is founded. For, the *opposite* experiences, as they are called, are not *contradictory* to each other: since “there is” (as has been justly observed) “no inconsistency “in believing them *both*<sup>b</sup>.” A Miracle necessarily supposes an established and *generally* unaltered (though not unalterable) course of things; for, in its interruption of such a course lies the very essence of a Miracle, as here understood. Our experience, therefore, of the course of Nature leads us to expect its continuance, and to act accordingly; but it

<sup>b</sup> See Campbell on Miracles. Part I. Sect. 1.

does not set aside any proofs, from competent testimony, of a deviation from it: neither can our being personally unacquainted with a matter of fact which took place a thousand years ago, or in a distant part of the world, warrant us in disbelieving the testimony of personal witnesses of the fact. Common sense revolts at the absurdity of considering one man's ignorance or inexperience as a counterpoise to another man's knowledge and experience of a matter of fact. Yet on no better foundation does this favourite argument of Infidels appear to rest.

But, that we may not seem to do our adversaries injustice, by imputing to them absurdities, which they will, perhaps, disclaim; let us examine a little farther into the weight of the argument derived from the supposed immutability of the laws of Nature. It has constantly been the theme of modern Unbelievers, that the course of Nature is fixed, eternal, unalterable; and that nothing which is supposed to violate it can possibly take place. Now, we may readily allow, that the course of Nature is unalterable by *human* power; nay, even by the power of any *created* being whatsoever. But the question is, are these laws unalterable *by Him who made them*? Proof of this is requisite, before the ar-

gument from the immutability of the laws of Nature can have the least force. We may safely assert, however, that proof of this is absolutely impossible. "Facts," it may be said, "daily passing before us, warrant us in "*supposing* its laws to be unchangeable." Perhaps so. But if a thousand or more facts have occurred, since the creation of the world, in which those laws appear to have been overruled, or suspended, is such a conclusion *then* warrantable? Even if there had never been a single instance of a Miracle recorded, since the creation; yet the conclusion would not be strictly logical, that no such thing is possible. But with such a multiplicity of instances to the contrary as are already on record, it is no better than a bare assertion in direct opposition to the evidence of men's senses and experience. Nay, more; the argument is *atheistical*. For, either God made and ordained these laws of Nature, and may, consequently, at his pleasure, unmake or suspend them: or else, these laws are self-framed, and Nature is independent of the God of Nature: which is saying, in other words, that the material Universe is not governed by any Supreme Intelligence.

This latter opinion appears, indeed, to be the tenet of all who resort to arguments of this

kind, in opposition to the credibility of Miracles. Thus it is said, by the Writer already referred to<sup>c</sup>, that every effect must have a cause; and that, therefore, a Miracle must have a cause in *Nature*; otherwise, it cannot be effected.—But, is not the *Will of God*, without any other agency, or predisposing cause, sufficient for the purpose? When God created the world out of nothing, what pre-existing cause was there, except his own omnipotent Will, to produce the effect? Why, then, is not the same Will sufficient to work Miracles?

“But,” says another Sophist<sup>d</sup>, “God is the Author of the laws of Nature; so that “whatever opposes those laws is necessarily “*repugnant to the Divine nature*; if, therefore, “we believe that God may act in a manner “contrary to those laws, we, in effect, believe “that he may do what is contrary to *his own* “*nature*; which is absurd and impossible.”

This reasoning turns upon the supposition that God is actuated by an absolute *necessity* of his Nature, and not by his *will*: or, rather, that he hath neither will nor intellect. Otherwise, it were easy to perceive, that, in suspending the operation of his own laws, God

<sup>c</sup> Hume.

<sup>d</sup> Spinoza.

cannot be charged with doing any thing contradictory to *his own* nature; since he may justly be supposed to have as good reasons for *departing* from those laws as for *framing* them: and as we know not why he framed them in such a manner, and no otherwise; so he may have the best and wisest reasons for his suspension of them, which it is not for us to call in question. To speak of the Supreme Being as actuated by a kind of physical necessity, and not by his *will*, is to confound the God of nature with nature itself; which is the very essence of Atheism, and never can be reconciled with any just notions of the Deity, as a Being of intellectual and moral perfections.

If, then, by men of *atheistical* principles only, any argument for the physical impossibility of Miracles can be maintained; we need trouble ourselves no farther in the refutation of it; and having already urged more, perhaps, than is sufficient to expose its falsehood and absurdity, we may now proceed to examine the reasoning of those who do not deny the *physical* possibility of Miracles, but regard them as *morally* impossible, because derogatory, as they conceive, from the perfections of the Deity.

“It is impossible,” says an Oracle among



modern Unbelievers<sup>e</sup>, “that a Being infinitely  
“ wise should make laws in order to violate  
“ them. He would not derange the machine  
“ of his own construction, unless it were for  
“ its improvement. But as a God, he hath,  
“ without doubt, made it as perfect as pos-  
“ sible: or, if he had foreseen any imperfection  
“ likely to result from it, he would surely  
“ have provided against it from the beginning,  
“ and not be under a necessity of changing  
“ it afterwards. He is both unchangeable  
“ and omnipotent; and therefore can neither  
“ have any desire to alter the course of nature,  
“ nor have any need to do so.”

This argument is grounded on a misconception, or a misrepresentation, of the *design* of Miracles; which is not the remedy of any *physical* defect, not to rectify any original or accidental imperfections in the laws of nature; but to manifest to the world the interposition of the Almighty, for especial purposes of a *moral* kind. It is simply, *to make known to mankind* that it is *He* who addresses them: and that whatever is accompanied with this species of evidence comes from Him, and claims their implicit belief and obedience. The perfection, therefore, or imperfection, of the laws of Nature, has no-

<sup>e</sup> Voltaire. Dictionnaire Philosophique.

thing to do with the question. All nature is subservient to the will of God : and as his *existence* and *attributes* are manifested in the ordinary course of nature ; so, in the *extraordinary* work of Miracles, his *will* is manifested by the display of his absolute sovereignty over the course of nature. Thus, in both instances, the Creator is “glorified “in His works;” and it is made to appear, that “by Him all things consist,” and that “for His pleasure they are, and were created.”—This seems a sufficient answer to any reasoning *à priori* against Miracles, from their supposed inconsistency with the Divine perfections.

But, secondly, admitting the possibility of Miracles, can we prove their *sufficiency* as evidences of a Divine interposition ?

On this head, we are often assailed with subtle objections.

Sometimes it is said, that we know not the *extent* of the powers of Nature, and therefore may attribute that to supernatural agency, which is, perhaps, only the effect of an unperceived cooperation of natural causes ; such as, if developed to our view, would sufficiently explain the supposed miraculous phenomenon, and shew the error of attributing it to any extraordinary act of Divine power.

That some strange and unaccountable phenomena may occasionally arise, which, though we are unable to discern their proximate causes, it were yet rash and unwarrantable to ascribe to supernatural power, may readily be granted. Nevertheless, it is certain, that there are facts upon record of such a kind as compel us to assign to them higher causes than any possible combination of natural powers, because they are plainly *contrary* to the laws of Nature. Thus, that a man is utterly unable, by any physical energies, to walk on the sea, or to remain unhurt in a fiery furnace: and that, the dead cannot be raised by any exertion of human power; are points, on which it is impossible to entertain a doubt. Whatever difficulty, therefore, there may be in *some* cases, in ascertaining whether the agency be natural or supernatural; yet in *others* the supernatural agency is so clear that we cannot call it in question, without contradicting the evidence of our senses, or denying the most indisputable principles of physical science.

But the Sceptic will still urge the difficulty of proving, that a Miracle, however real and undoubted, is the *work of God*. He will insist, that it may be (for aught we can shew to the contrary) the work of some

spiritual agent, whose powers over the laws of Nature exceed our own : or even the work of some Evil Spirit, wrought purposely for our delusion.

In answer to this objection, we contend that no power of changing or suspending the laws of nature can be *inherent* in any but God himself ; and that if such power be at any time *delegated* by Him to inferior beings, still it cannot be exercised *independently of His Will*.

The very arguments which are sometimes urged against the possibility of Miracles being wrought even by the Almighty himself, although they totally fail of proving *that* point, may be successfully urged against the possibility of their being wrought *by any thing less than Divine power*. The laws of Nature being ordained by the Creator, it seems absurd to imagine that they can be violated or suspended, but by His concurrence, at least, if not immediate agency : and if His *concurrence* be necessary, we have full assurance that they can never be wrought but to *effect His purposes*. If there were an *inherent* power in any inferior agent, to control, at his pleasure, the laws of Nature, then would there be a created being equal to his Creator ; and if even a *delegated* power,

to the same extent, were committed to any created being, then would the Almighty seem to relinquish the sovereignty over His creatures ;—neither of which suppositions can consist with correct notions of the Divine perfections. Still less can we suppose, that any *evil* Spirit should possess either an inherent or delegated power of this kind, to be exercised at will, and without restraint ; since this were at once to fall into the impieties of Manicheism, and to set up a rival power of malignity and mischief, equal, if not superior, to God himself.

It is also to be observed, that no probable conjectures respecting the power of Spirits, whether good or evil, can be formed without the light of *Revelation* ; and that when we go to the written word of God for information on this subject, we find it expressly declared, that “ the counsel of the Lord, that “ shall stand<sup>f</sup>,” and “ He will do all His pleasures<sup>g</sup> ;” that “ He hath made all things for “ Himself<sup>h</sup> ;” that “ there is no wisdom, nor “ understanding, nor counsel, against the “ Lord<sup>i</sup> ;” and that “ He doeth according to “ His will in the army of Heaven, and among “ the inhabitants of the Earth ; and none

<sup>f</sup> Prov. xix. 21.

<sup>g</sup> Isa. xlvi. 10.

<sup>h</sup> Prov. xvi. 4.

<sup>i</sup> Prov. xxi. 30.



“ can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou<sup>k</sup>?—declarations, which sufficiently assure us, that no Miracle can be effected without power immediately exercised by the Creator, or communicated by Him to some of His creatures, for some especial purpose, and under His especial direction.

But how, it may be said, is this reconcilable with “ the lying wonders” and delusions, which we read of among the Heathen of old; and with those “ depths of Satan<sup>l</sup>,” against which we are warned in Holy Writ? or how will it enable us to solve some strange occurrences related, both in the Old and New Testament, respecting those enemies to truth, who at sundry times “ bewitched the people “ with their sorceries<sup>m</sup>,” and “ ceased not to “ pervert the right ways of the Lord<sup>n</sup>?”

With respect to the *Heathen* Miracles recorded in profane history, it will be found, upon an accurate investigation, that few, if any of them, have the slightest pretensions to be regarded as Miracles, in the true and proper acceptation of the word. Lying wonders and delusions, were, indeed, frequent: but these, for the most part, betray such evident tokens of imposture, as render them scarcely deserving of serious consideration.

<sup>k</sup> Dan. iv. 35. <sup>l</sup> Rev. ii. 24. <sup>m</sup> Acts viii. 11. <sup>n</sup> Acts xiii. 10.

If, however, we should incline to the opinion, that, in some few instances, God (for the punishment of those who willingly gave into such delusions) might permit Evil Spirits to perform certain strange things exceeding the natural powers of Mankind, still it will appear that their powers were limited within very narrow boundaries, and oftentimes visibly overruled by the Divine agency. No instance can be brought of any reputed Heathen Miracle, which indicates an ability in the worker of it to exercise at his will such a supernatural power. Neither does it appear that these Miracles were wrought in confirmation of any doctrine, or in proof of any religious system, which claimed the attention of mankind. In both these respects, therefore, the Heathen miracles differ essentially from those of the Scriptures; which latter will always be found (as we shall presently endeavour to shew) to carry with them some indisputable tokens (such as no others may pretend to) of their Divine original.

As to the histories in the Old and New Testament, respecting Sorcerers and wonder-working Deceivers: none of them afford any positive evidence that the power of working Miracles, *ad libitum*, belongs to Evil Spirits.

The few instances of the kind recorded in Scripture may be satisfactorily explained, by attributing the Miracle (if such indeed were clearly wrought) to the direct interposition of the Almighty, operating, even through the medium of *evil* agents, for purposes manifestly wise and good.—Wicked Spirits, as well as wicked men, may be instruments in the hand of God, either to inflict judgments on the obstinate and impenitent, or to evince, in some extraordinary manner, the Divine power and preeminence. The history of the Magicians who withstood Moses in the presence of Pharaoh, and other narratives of a similar kind, have been well elucidated upon this principle<sup>o</sup>: and it will be time enough to enter more largely on the subject, when other clear and undoubted facts shall be produced, which may render such a particular vindication necessary.

Dismissing, therefore, this part of our subject, we may proceed to offer a few remarks in defence of the Scripture-Miracles, as affording the strongest testimony that can be desired of the truth of Revealed Religion.

The evidence necessary to prove a Miracle, is the same as that which is necessary to prove any other matter of *fact*; the evidence of

<sup>o</sup> See Fleetwood on Miracles.

our own senses, or the testimony of others. Miracles, however, being *extraordinary facts*, an *extraordinary degree of evidence* in support of them may reasonably be expected; and this, we maintain, the Scripture-Miracles do really possess. More than this we cannot be expected to produce.

“But pretences to Miracles,” says the Sceptic, “having been abundant, in all ages, and “having imposed on a vast portion of mankind; by what rule are we to distinguish “real from pretended Miracles<sup>P</sup>?”

One of the acutest writers on this subject (a venerable Prelate of our own times<sup>P</sup>) in an admirable Treatise, entitled, “The “Criterion, or Miracles examined,” lays down certain general rules for *trying* Miracles; which have the advantage of being not only decisive and clear, but exceedingly simple and easy of application. The rules are as follow:—That we may reasonably suspect any accounts of Miracles to be false, if they were not published *till long after the time* when they are said to have been performed;—or, if they were not published *in the place* where they are said to have been wrought—or if they might probably have been suffered to *pass without examination*, in the time,

<sup>P</sup> Bishop Douglas.

and at the place, where they took their rise. These are *general* grounds of suspicion ; to which may be added *particular* grounds of it, arising from any circumstances which plainly indicate imposture and artifice on the one hand, or credulity and imagination on the other.

In almost all the accounts of Pagan Miracles of old, and of Popish or other Miracles in modern times, some of these suspicious circumstances are invariably found ; so that we can place little or no reliance on them, as true and undoubted miracles. In numberless instances, it is evident that the accounts were either fabricated, or supported, by persons interested in their success, who had it in their power to prevent the world from being undeceived ; and also that the people themselves “loved to have it so,” being already predisposed to believe them without inquiry or examination. In other cases there is great reason to suspect that the power of *imagination* greatly aided in effecting what were thought to be Miracles, and prevented men from sufficiently discriminating between natural and supernatural agency. To which is to be added, (as a general observation carefully to be kept in mind,) that in no spurious Miracle do we find an adequate



*reason* or *motive* assigned for the wonder supposed to have been wrought; nor any circumstance connecting it with a declared purpose of the Almighty, *previously* announced as giving occasion to its performance.

But in the Scripture-Miracles, both of the Old and New Testament, the case is entirely otherwise. The accounts of them were published in the very place, and almost at the very time, in which they were performed. They were related by eyewitnesses, and addressed to persons who were also eyewitnesses, of the facts. They underwent the severest scrutiny, being publicly wrought in declared confirmation of a system repugnant to the prevailing opinions of the times, and vehemently withstood by those who had the greatest authority and influence to obstruct its progress. The certainty of these matters of fact appears to be incontrovertible: and that they were, in the strictest and fullest sense of the word, *miraculous*, is no less evident, from the impossibility of their being the result of enthusiasm or imposture, and from many circumstances attending them, which put it out of all doubt, whether they proceeded from natural or supernatural power.

With respect to our Lord's Miracles in particular, he not only healed prodigious numbers by a word or a touch, as soon as they were brought to him, but some who were absent from Him, and who did not even know that application had been made to Him. His success in the exercise of this power was also *universal*:—"as many as touched Him were made whole<sup>q</sup>;" He healed "all manner of diseases among the people<sup>r</sup>;" and we do not hear of a failure in one single instance. These are strong proofs that there could be no delusion on His part, nor any enthusiastic imagination on the part of those on whom the Miracles were wrought. But to this we may add, that many of His Miracles were such as could not possibly be effected by any combination of fortuitous circumstances, or any operation of natural causes: such as restoring sight to a person born blind, turning water into wine, feeding thousands with a few small loaves and fishes, walking on the sea, stilling the tempest, and raising the dead to life. All these are in their own nature miraculous; some of them, directly repugnant to the known laws of nature; others, requiring an absolutely *creative* power; others, indicating such

<sup>q</sup> Mark vi. 56.

<sup>r</sup> Matt. iv. 23.

a control over the elements themselves, as none but the Great Preserver and Governor of the Universe can be supposed to possess.

Similar observations are applicable to the Miracles of the Old Testament. Infidels have indeed laboured to account for some of these by *natural* causes; and others, which cannot possibly admit of such a solution, they scoff at as absurd and ridiculous. But ridicule cast upon any real and well-attested Miracle, will only prove the scoffer to be the insolent derider of his Maker: for if it be impossible to disprove the matter of fact, or to account for it but by supernatural agency, all his cavils, his jests, and his sarcasms, are virtually directed against the Great Author of nature.

Now that the Miracles of the Old Testament are as well authenticated as any matters of fact recorded in history, has already been largely proved: and it would be equally easy to prove, that the attempt to explain them by any *natural* causes is altogether vain and futile. But, (not to enter into a detailed consideration of the succession of wonders related to have been performed, from the settlement of the tribes in Canaan to the termination of the Babylonish Captivity,) those recorded of *Moses* sufficiently evince a

power which had an absolute control over the natural world. “Marvellous things did he,” in the sight of his fellow-countrymen, nay, of his enemies likewise, “in the land of Egypt, “in the field of Zoan<sup>s</sup> ;” things, which Unbelievers and Half-believers in vain endeavour to represent as the result of the ordinary operations of nature. For even if it should be thought physically possible that some of the Egyptian plagues might occur in the common course of nature ; yet their occurrence *at such a time, and under such circumstances*, can never be thus explained ; some of these prodigies being directly contrary to the established order of the seasons ; others no less contrary to the general laws of nature ; and all of them succeeding each other with a rapidity and suddenness, which plainly indicated that they were effected without any predisposing physical causes. But that which most clearly proves them to have been preternaturally wrought, is the express declaration of Moses, previously to each Miracle, that it should actually come to pass, *at a specific time*. “The Lord *appointed* a set “time, saying, *To-morrow* the Lord shall do “this thing in the land :—and the Lord *did*

<sup>s</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 13.

“that thing *on the morrow*<sup>t</sup>.” Here a Miracle of *some* kind is indisputable: the Sceptic being reduced to the dilemma of either acknowledging that the events themselves were miraculous, or that Moses, at least, was miraculously gifted to foretell them.

But farther; the Miracles both of the Old and New Testament are substantiated, by another very strong and convincing proof of their being the undoubted result of Divine agency, arising from their peculiar *intent* and *propriety*, as connected with the system which they were designed to attest.

In the Miracles which our Lord performed, He not only evinced His Divine power, but fulfilled many important Prophecies relating to Him as the Messiah. Thus they afforded a twofold evidence of His authority. In several of them, we perceive likewise a striking reference to the especial *object* of His mission. Continually did He apply these wonderful *works* to the purpose of inculcating and establishing *doctrines*, no less wonderful and interesting to the sons of men. Thus while He displayed the powers of the benevolent Creator and Preserver of mankind, He also illustrated His character of Redeemer. That

<sup>t</sup> Exod. ix. 5, 6. also viii. 22, 23. ix. 18. x. 4. 13



men “might know that He had power on “earth to forgive sins,” and to restore the spiritual frame, however debilitated and decayed, and even “dead in trespasses and sins,” He enabled the paralytic to “take up his bed “and walk,” and raised the dead to life. Eyes was He to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor, in the spiritual, no less than in the literal sense. To assure His Apostles of their future success as preachers of His Gospel, He encouraged them by a miraculous draught of fishes to follow Him, and to become “fishers of men.” He taught the universality of His religion, and the coming in of the Gentiles to the Christian Covenant, by purifying the outer court of the Temple, and miraculously driving out the Jewish traffickers who despised and profaned it. He foreshewed the approaching destruction of the Jewish Church and its excision from the favour of God, by devoting the barren fig-tree to sudden decay and dissolution. By expelling demons from the bodies of men, he manifested his irresistible power over Satan and his agents, and gave a pledge of his delivering the souls of men from their cruel devastation. Whoever duly weighs this peculiarity of character in the Miracles of our

<sup>u</sup> Ephes. ii. 1

blessed Saviour, will perceive a connection between them and his doctrines, which at once distinguishes them from the works of any *pretended* messenger of God, and stamps them with an authority more than human.

The same may likewise be remarked of the Miracles recorded of the Apostles after our Lord's departure from this world; in none of which do we find any thing done for mere ostentation; but an evident attention to the great purpose of the Gospel, that of "turning  
" men from darkness unto light, and from the  
" power of Satan unto God<sup>x</sup>." The great work which their Blessed Master had begun, was carried on by them in the same spirit of wisdom as well as of power, and a striking coincidence may often be perceived between the doctrine which they taught and the signs and wonders by which it was confirmed.

The Scriptures of the Old Testament record a continued succession of wonderful works, connected also, in a most remarkable manner, with the *system* carried on from the fall of Adam to the coming of Christ. The very first promise of a Redeemer who should bruise the Serpent's head, appears to have been accompanied with a signal Miracle, by which the nature of the serpent tribe was

<sup>x</sup> Acts xxvi. 18.

instantly changed, and reduced to a state of degradation and baseness, expressive of the final overthrow of that Evil Spirit, through whose deceits man had fallen from his innocence and glory. The mark set upon Cain was probably a miraculous change in his external appearance, significant of his offence; or some other Miracle, wrought as a sign to assure him that he should not be destroyed. The general Deluge was a signal instance of a miraculous punishment inflicted upon the whole race of mankind, when they had departed from the living God, and were become utterly irreclaimable. The dispersion at Babel, and the confusion of tongues, indicated the Divine purpose of preventing an intermixture of idolaters and atheists with the worshippers of the true God. The wonders wrought in Egypt by the hand of Moses, were pointedly directed against the senseless and abominable idolatries of that devoted country, and were manifestly designed to expose their absurdity and falsehood, as well as to effect the deliverance of God's people Israel. The subsequent Miracles in the Desert had an evident tendency to wean the Israelites from an attachment to the false Deities of the surrounding nations, and to instruct them by figurative representations

in that “better Covenant, established upon “better promises<sup>y</sup>,” of which the Mosaic institute was designed to be a shadow and a type. The settlement of the Israelites in Canaan under their leader Joshua, and their continuance in it for a long succession of ages, were accompanied with a series of wonders, all operating to that one purpose of the Almighty, the separation of his people from a wicked and apostate world, and the preservation of a chosen seed through whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Every Miracle wrought under the Jewish Theocracy appears to have been intended, either to correct the superstitions and impieties of the neighbouring nations, and to bring them to a conviction that the Lord Jehovah was the true God, and that besides Him there was none other; or to reclaim the Jews, whenever they betrayed a disposition to relapse into Heathenish abominations, and to forsake that true Religion which the Almighty had pledged himself to uphold throughout all ages, and for the completion of which he was then, in his infinite Wisdom, arranging all human events.

It seems impossible for any thinking man, to take such a view as this of the peculiar

<sup>y</sup> Heb. viii. 6.

design and use of the Scripture-Miracles, and not to perceive in them the unerring counsels of infinite *Wisdom*, as well as the undoubted exertions of infinite *Power*. When we see the several parts of this stupendous scheme thus harmonizing and cooperating for the attainment of one specific object, of the highest importance to the whole race of mankind ; we cannot but be struck with a conviction of the absolute impossibility of imposture or enthusiasm, in any part of the proceeding. We are compelled to acknowledge, that they exhibit proofs of Divine agency carried on in one continued series ; such as no other system hath ever pretended to ; such as not only surpass all human ingenuity, but seem impossible to have been effected by any combination of created beings.

In proof that no other religious system is supported by any thing which, in these respects, can be put in competition with the Scripture-Miracles, it were easy to shew, by a particular examination, that the prodigies which Unbelievers bring into comparison with them, are destitute of all those marks of credibility which arise from any inherent propriety, or from any perceptible connection with a design to which the least degree of importance may be attached. So that even



if it were impossible to disprove their *reality* as miracles, or if we were compelled to infer from them that Miracles might be wrought by powers inferior to the Almighty; still we should be under no necessity of relinquishing our belief in the *Scripture-Miracles*, as manifestly proceeding from Him alone. But for a detailed illustration of this argument, recourse must be had, by those who can still think it necessary, to the labours of such writers as have made it their study to investigate the subject with minuter accuracy, than the limits of this Discourse will allow.

It appears, then, on a review of the preceding arguments, that the Scripture-Miracles stand on a solid basis, which no *reasoning* can overthrow. Their *possibility* cannot be denied, without denying the very nature of God, as an all-powerful Being: their *probability* cannot be questioned, without questioning His *moral* perfections:—and their *certainity*, as matters of fact, can only be invalidated, by destroying the very foundations of all human testimony.

Upon these grounds, we may safely leave the subject in the hands of any wise and considerate man: and we may venture to affirm, that no person of such a character will, after an attentive examination of these points, ever

suffer his faith in the Miracles by which the Divine Authority of the Christian Revelation is supported, to be shaken. Convinced that, by a fair chain of reasoning, every one who denies them must be driven to the necessity of maintaining *atheistical* principles, by questioning either the power, or wisdom, or goodness of the Creator, the true Philosopher will yield to the force of this consideration, as well as to the overpowering evidences of the facts themselves ; and will thankfully accept the Dispensation which God hath thus graciously vouchsafed to reveal. He will suffer neither wit, nor ridicule, nor sophistry, to rob him of this anchor of his faith ; but will turn to his Saviour, with the confidence so emphatically expressed by Nicodemus ; “ Rabbi, “ we know that thou art a Teacher come “ from God ; for, no man can do these Mi- “ racles that Thou doest, except GOD be “ with him.”

## SERMON XXII.

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2 PETER i. 21.

*Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man :  
but holy men of God spake as they were moved  
by the Holy Ghost.*

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TO this clear and positive assertion of the Apostle, respecting the Divine origin of Prophecy, the Infidel has many objections to advance. He has much to say concerning the power of imagination, the sagacity of conjecture, and the accidental occurrence or absolute fatality of human events; whence he would insinuate the utter uncertainty of any conclusions to be drawn from Prophecy, in favour of Revealed Religion.

There is undoubtedly great scope on the subject of Prophecy, as well as on that of Miracles, for the exercise of perverse ingenuity: and objections may easily be urged, in the one case as in the other, which are likely to make impression on the minds of those

who are unpractised in developing the fallacies of insidious sophistry. Prophecy is indeed in itself a species of Miracle, and is no otherwise distinguishable from it, in its appropriate character, than as the one relates more immediately to the *Power* of God, the other to his *Knowledge*, the former being the work of Omniscience, the latter of Omnipotence. Having therefore so close a relation to each other, these two kinds of evidence are liable to be assailed by the same mode of attack. Thus he who denies the possibility of Miracles, will hardly scruple to deny the possibility of Prophecy. He who contends that it is inconsistent with the perfections of the Creator, to suffer the laws of nature to be altered or suspended for any purpose whatever, will by similar arguments endeavour to prove, that it is equally derogatory from his attributes to bestow on men, in any case, the faculty of looking into futurity. He who insists, that what are called Miracles may proceed from *natural* causes, however to us inexplicable, will maintain that Prophecy may be ascribed to the mere conjectures or shrewd guesses of mankind. He, again, who admits that in both there may be something *preternatural*, but denies that either of them afford sufficient evidence of *Divine* interposition, will affirm

that as Miracles may be the effect of spiritual delusions, so Predictions of all kinds may proceed from the suggestions of beings inferior to God, and even of Evil Spirits in opposition to the Divine Will.

Were we to follow “the disputer of this world” through this train of objections, we should have to repeat many arguments already urged, in treating of the subject of Miracles. We may therefore be spared the trouble of discussing again these *general* topics of dispute, and content ourselves with touching upon those points which seem more peculiarly to belong to the subject of Prophecy, as a species of evidence *distinct* from that of Miracles, though connected with it, as to its tendency and design.

But before we enter upon this inquiry, it is expedient that we should rightly understand in what consists the real *importance* of this species of evidence, and how far the truth of Revelation is confirmed by it ; since it is probably for want of duly considering the right *use of Prophecy*, that unwarrantable exceptions have been sometimes made against it ; and that at other times it has been insidiously magnified, for the purpose of derogating from the *other* evidences by which Christianity is supported.



Whatever importance we may attach to Prophecy, as a part of the Christian evidences, (and we can hardly attach too great importance to it,) we must be careful to remember, that *the truth of the facts themselves*, on which Christianity is founded, does not at all depend on the Prophecies relating to them. Facts speak for themselves; and our knowledge of them is derived from the evidence of our own senses, or from the testimony of others, without any reference to Prophecy; which must, from the very nature of the thing, be *antecedent* to the facts, and, therefore, incapable of attesting them.

Hence it follows, that Prophecy is not in itself absolutely necessary to establish a Divine mission; although it may, in certain cases, and in a certain degree, become so, for the support of a particular Revelation professing to rest upon that as one of its main pillars of evidence. A Divine mission may be satisfactorily proved by Miracles alone, without the additional aid of Prophecy. MOSES was not foretold by any Prophet; yet was his mission fully and amply proved by the Miracles which he wrought: and, without doubt, the mission of CHRIST might also have been clearly proved, although supported by this evidence alone. But Prophecy ap-

pears to have been necessary with reference to the *Jews*, in particular, because they were already in possession of a Revelation proved by *Miracles*; and unless something in that very Revelation had taught them to look for a *new* Dispensation, they must, from an entire conviction of its sufficiency, have adhered to that which they already enjoyed. Nothing, perhaps, could or ought to have satisfied the Jews of the truth of the Christian Revelation, without evidence drawn in support of it from their own Scriptures. Prophecy was therefore to *them* peculiarly necessary, and might, with respect to *their* case, be justly called “the *surer* word of Prophecy,” whose evidence was paramount even to that of *Miracles*. To *us*, on the other hand, (partly in consequence of this necessity of Prophecy for the Jews,) the evidence drawn from the *fulfilment* of Prophecy is become also necessary. For, since our Lord professed to be the very Messiah foretold in the Jewish Scriptures, the proofs that he was really predicted in those writings, and that in Him all these things were accomplished, became indispensable, in order to establish, not merely his authority as a messenger from God, but his exclusive pretensions to the particular character of the Messiah. In this view, there-

fore, Prophecy may justly be considered as one essential part of the Christian evidence.

But it is also of further importance, in a general point of view, as an undecaying and perpetual testimony to the truth of any Revelation whatsoever. Miracles may make a stronger and more vivid impression at the time when they are wrought: but Prophecy keeps up the attention of distant ages, and prevents those impressions from wearing away. Miracles, instantaneously wrought, may, like common facts, appear to lose something of their certainty, the farther we are removed from them. But Prophecy, relating to a continued series of events, is a Miracle of a more durable kind; and the more remote the accomplishment is from the prediction, the more complete is the testimony which it gives of its Divine origin.

The question, therefore, which has sometimes been agitated, whether Miracles or Prophecies afford the stronger attestation to Revealed Religion, seems to be unnecessary and injudicious. God never works either superfluously or in vain. Consequently, we ought to infer that *both* are necessary, since both have been vouchsafed. If Miracles alone had been sufficient, Prophecy would have found no place in the Christian

scheme : if Prophecy could of itself have answered the purpose, Miracles would surely never have been wrought. Neither is it difficult to discern the respective utility of each, as well as the effect of their joint operation, if we duly consider either the general design of Revealed Religion, as a plan to be conducted through all ages of the world from the beginning to the end of time, or the particular character of its several Dispensations, and what kind of evidence was best adapted to give them their respective credibility.

The especial use and intent of Prophecy, in the several ages of the world, are easy to be discerned. "The testimony of Jesus," saith St. John, "is the spirit of Prophecy<sup>a</sup>." To testify concerning Him as the Messiah and the Saviour of the world, was the one grand purpose of the Scripture Prophecies ; to which other topics were collateral only and subordinate. Many of these relate to his personal character and office : others to the establishment and progress of his spiritual kingdom. Divines have accordingly arranged the Prophecies concerning Christ under two general heads ; dividing them into such as relate to his *first* coming, which had their full and entire completion in his per-

<sup>a</sup> Rev. xix. 10.

son : and such as relate to his *second* coming, comprising a long series of events, preparatory to that final close of the Christian dispensation, some of which are already accomplished, others are now fulfilling, whilst others are still awaiting their completion at some distant period.

Here, then, is a vast variety of objects and concerns, embraced under the one great design of bearing testimony to Jesus, as “the Author and Finisher of our Faith ;” and it will immediately be perceived that no correct judgment can be formed of the several parts of such a system, without considering Jesus Christ himself “as the chief corner stone, in whom all the building is fitly framed together<sup>b</sup>.”

Connected with this first and great design, there are Prophecies of a different class, in which are predicted the rise or fall of particular persons, families, or states ; most, if not all, of which have some reference to the main object already mentioned ; and the fulfilment of those Prophecies of a *temporal* nature served in many instances as pledges or as means of the accomplishment of such as relate to *spiritual* blessings of primary and universal importance.

<sup>b</sup> Ephes. ii. 20, 21.



They who duly consider the prodigious extent and complicated nature of such a plan, will not only be convinced that to devise or execute it is far beyond the power of *man*, but will be prepared to meet with something of intricacy, and even obscurity, in the *detail* of the plan, which the limited powers of the human understanding may not be able completely to unravel. They will perceive that a scheme of Divine wisdom, to be carried on through all ages of the world, and embracing an infinite diversity of times, persons, and places, must require means to conduct and to unfold it, of which it is impossible that man should be a competent judge. Hence they will be led to examine the subject with humility and reverence; and being accustomed to view it on a large and comprehensive scale, will be the better able to refute such cavils as arise from inattention to its general design.

But, through neglect or contempt of these important considerations, objections are continually advanced against the evidence of Prophecy, grounded on the alleged obscurity of some particular predictions; respecting which our Adversaries oftentimes argue, as if it were necessary that men who are divinely inspired should have as distinct an appre-

hension of what they predict, as those who are to be eyewitnesses of the events ; and should be able to describe them as graphically as the Historian does things already past. Hence they complain of the scantiness of the information afforded in the prophetic writings, and scoff at what they represent to be the misapplied ingenuity of such as are employed in tracing the conformity of the events with the predictions, and who infer from that agreement the Divine Inspiration of the Prophets. Thus they insinuate, or more than insinuate, that the whole is the work of mere *Imagination*, on the part both of the Prophet and the interpreter of Prophecy.

To prevent our being misled by cavils of this kind, we must beware of forming extravagant notions of the *extent* of prophetic Inspiration, or of laying down fanciful and arbitrary rules as the criterion of the Divine conduct. There is no reason to suppose that a full and perfect knowledge of futurity must have been imparted by the Almighty, to every Prophet whom he commissioned to declare His Will ; or that any one Prophet should have had as clear a conception of the several particulars of the Christian Dispensation as those who lived to see it accomplished,

and who had the advantage of comparing together *all* that the Prophets had foretold. “We know in part,” says the Apostle, “and “we *prophesy in part* ;”—“we see through a “glass, darkly.” The knowledge given by Prophecy was not intended to convey to those on whom the gift was bestowed more information than was necessary for raising expectation *before* the event, and for proving, *after* the event, that the expectation was well-founded. *More* than this could answer no useful purpose : and to require more, only indicates a presumptuous and irreverent curiosity. Never indeed was this gift bestowed “without measure,” but upon HIM in whom “dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead.” To others, it has been vouchsafed in various degrees ; not for the Prophet’s own personal information, nor for the gratification of vain and frivolous inquiry, but according to what might be deemed necessary by the Spirit of Infinite Wisdom, “dividing to every man “severally as he will<sup>d</sup>.”

Every objection, therefore, grounded on the particular distribution of this gift, may be resolved into an indirect attack on the wisdom of God himself, from whom the gift must of necessity be received.

<sup>c</sup> I Cor. xiii. 9, 12.

<sup>d</sup> I Cor. xii. 11.

But objections of this kind against the evidence of Prophecy would hardly enter into men's minds, did they duly attend to the times and circumstances under which it was vouchsafed, and consider what purpose it was manifestly designed to answer. Its intent (as has just been intimated) was to raise a general expectation of the promised Redeemer; to direct the Jews in particular to a better Covenant than that which, for temporary purposes, had been vouchsafed to them; and to confirm the faith of them and others in that Redeemer, when he should afterwards appear. If these objects have been attained, no one can deny that the Prophecies, whether more or less explicit, have accomplished the end proposed.

It will not be denied, that at the time of our Lord's coming into the world a very general expectation of the birth of some extraordinary person prevailed, not only among the Jews, but also among other nations. Heathen Authors, in or near the Augustan age, bear testimony to this fact: and with respect to the Jewish persuasions, it is very remarkable, that *before* the time of our Blessed Saviour not one pretended Messiah is recorded to have appeared, though *after* him there were several who availed themselves of the ardent expectation

of the times, to advance their pretensions. Whence did this expectation arise? Whence *could* it arise, but from the Scripture Prophecies, or from Gentile traditions to be traced to that source? Here, then, is positive evidence, that the Prophecies *did* answer their intent, so far as relates to those who lived in times *anterior* to the coming of Christ; and, in this acknowledged fact, we have a satisfactory answer to almost all that can be alleged against Prophecy from its supposed *obscurity*.

But we have said that Prophecy was designed also to be a perpetual and never-failing testimony of the Divine wisdom and power in the completion of its predictions. Without this, the faith of after-ages as well as of preceding times had wanted one of its chief supports. Has then *this* purpose also been answered? Have these predictions been so clearly fulfilled, as to leave no room for us to doubt that the expectations of the faithful in the days of old were well-founded, and that what they earnestly looked for has actually taken place?

Here, again, *History* comes to our aid, and records in so distinct a manner as to preclude all suspicion of imposture or misrepresentation, a series of facts corresponding with the general tenor of Scripture Prophecy, and



even minutely verifying its most remarkable particulars. Scoffers, indeed, continually charge us with a fanciful application of Prophecy to events and circumstances, with which (as they contend) it cannot be clearly shewn to correspond. But, whatever shades of doubt and difficulty may still hang over some particular predictions, (concerning which the most learned and sagacious may continue to entertain some difference of opinion,) it is nevertheless impossible for any unprejudiced person to deny that there is a prodigious mass of solid and incontrovertible evidence, to be collected from history, in verification of the Scripture Prophecies. To detail the particulars of this evidence, (much more, to enter upon a vindication of those intricate and questionable points, on which the captious disputant delights to dwell,) is not within the compass of a discourse like this. Nor, where the force of the argument from a general collective view of those writings is so irresistibly powerful, can it be thought necessary for the conviction of reasonable men, to engage in the removal of minute and comparatively unimportant difficulties.

Instead, therefore, of insinuating in general and indefinite terms the uncertainty of Prophecy, and the probability that things

merely owing to conjecture and hazard might be passed upon the world for matters of Divine Revelation ;—instead of endeavouring to perplex the subject, by searching out particular passages of dark and doubtful meaning, (from which a work of such immense variety and extent can hardly be supposed to be exempt,)—let the Infidel fairly examine the most striking and conspicuous Prophecies, either in the Old or New Testament ; let him take even those the most distant from the occurrences by which they were accomplished, and requiring the most complicated series of events to bring them to pass ; let him consider also those which relate most circumstantially to times, places, and persons ; and, above all, let him view them in the order in which they were delivered, forming one continued chain of prophetic history, from the beginning to the end of the world :—let him thus examine the whole, on an enlarged and comprehensive scale, investigating the particular parts with reference to their combined effect ; and then tell us, whether he really believes it *possible*, that such things *could* have been foretold and fulfilled either by accident or by contrivance. Let him explain to us how the Prophet, by his own reason, experience, observation, or sagacity, or

even by any combination of human skill and ingenuity, could arrive at such a foreknowledge; or how any succeeding adventurers, however leagued together, could possibly bring such things to pass.—But we shall in vain call upon the Scoffer thus to step forth in the field of honourable combat, and vindicate his insinuations from the charge of falsehood and absurdity. He will ever shun the light, and shelter himself under dark and vague suspicions, whilst he knows that to meet his adversary in open day would be but to seek his own defeat and disgrace.

From this general view of the subject, we may venture to conclude that Prophecy has completely attained the two great ends which it had in view; that of affording solid grounds of expectation to those who lived before the Gospel-dispensation, and that of corroborating the faith of those who have lived in after-times. Having attained these ends, it serves likewise as the basis of our hope and confidence in things *yet to come*; in the glorious promises of the final triumph of Christ's kingdom on earth, and of those exceeding great rewards which are laid up in store for all his faithful subjects and servants.

But though the vain reasoner of this world may be unable to deprive us of these hopes,

(deeply grounded as they are in the truth and faithfulness of God's word,) yet will he continually harass us with "evil surmisings" and perverse disputings." He will call upon us to reexamine the foundation of these hopes. He will press us to point out some clear and certain rules by which we may discern between the true and false spirit of Prophecy; so as to prevent us from becoming the dupes of human knavery, or of spiritual delusions. He will insist, in particular, upon our explaining in what respects the *Scripture* Prophecies differ from the *Heathen* Oracles of old; or how the former, any more than the latter, can be cleared from the imputation of Fanaticism and Error.

Some observations have already been offered, to shew that the *Scripture* Prophecies bear the strongest marks of truth, and are supported by ample testimony of their Divine character. But when a question is made between these and *Heathen* Oracles, we may be expected to prove, not only that the former certainly *do* proceed from God, but that the latter as certainly *do not*. This may most readily be done, by contrasting them with each other; whence it will clearly appear, that there is a manifest difference between them, and that none but *Scripture*

Prophecies have the essential characteristics of Divine knowledge.

Many of the learned regard all the Heathen Oracles as the result of the grossest imposture. Some consider them as the work of Evil Spirits. Others are of opinion, that through these Oracles some real Prophecies were occasionally vouchsafed to the Gentile world, for their instruction and consolation. But to whichever of these opinions we may incline, it will not be difficult to discover a radical difference between these and the Scripture Prophecies.

In the Heathen Oracles we cannot discern any clear and unequivocal tokens of genuine Prophecy. They were destitute of dignity and importance, had no connection with each other, tended to no object of general concern, and never looked into times remote from their own. We read only of some few predictions or prognostications, scattered among the writings of Poets and Philosophers; most of which (besides being very weakly authenticated) appear to have been answers to questions of merely local, personal, and temporary concern, relating to the issue of affairs then actually in hand, and to events speedily to be determined. Far from attempting to form any *chain* of Prophecies, respecting



things far distant as to time or place, or matters contrary to human probability and requiring supernatural agency to effect them, the Heathen Priests and Soothsayers did not even pretend to a systematic and connected plan. They hardly dared indeed to assume the prophetic character in its full force; but stood trembling, as it were, on the brink of futurity, conscious of their inability to venture beyond the depths of human conjecture. Hence their predictions became so fleeting, so futile, so uninteresting, that they were never collected together as worthy of preservation; but soon fell into disrepute and almost total oblivion.

The Scripture Prophecies, on the other hand, constitute a series of predictions relating principally to one grand object of universal importance, the work of man's Redemption, and carried on in regular progression through the Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian dispensations, with a harmony and uniformity of design clearly indicating one and the same Divine Author; who alone could say, "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else, I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not

“yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, “and I will do all my pleasure<sup>c</sup>.” The genuine Prophets of the Almighty beheld these things with a clear and steadfast eye: they declared them with authority and confidence: and they gave moreover signs from Heaven for the conviction of others. Accordingly, their writings have been handed down from age to age: have been preserved with scrupulous fidelity; and have ever been regarded with reverence, from many incontestable evidences of their accomplishment, and from their inseparable connection with the religious hopes and expectations of mankind.

If we compare again the *circumstances* under which the Heathen Oracles and the Jewish Prophecies were delivered, or the *character* and *situation* of the persons by whom they were communicated, the contrast will be equally striking.

The Oracles of the Heathen were supported by the whole influence and power of the State, as well as by popular opinion. Their Priests were deeply interested in maintaining their credit: and every motive of gain on their part, and of policy on the part of the ruling powers, operated as inducements to uphold their reputation. Yet the

<sup>c</sup> Isa. xlv. 9, 10.

deceptions practised, to impose upon the ignorant and superstitious multitude, were oftentimes too gross to escape observation. Hence the priests appear to have been exceedingly distrustful of their own powers, and dared not hazard any answers in the presence of inquisitive and discerning persons. The answers, when given, were for the most part vague, indefinite, ambiguous; studiously avoiding any particularity of circumstance; capable of being applied to events of the most opposite kind; and sometimes even directly contradictory to each other.

The Jewish Prophets stand free from any such suspicion of interested or sinister motives. They spake indeed in the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel, whom their fellow-countrymen professed to venerate. But their mission, which was usually special and extraordinary, obliged them, on most occasions, to utter things which could promise them no returns of honour, of popularity, or of emolument. In foretelling events which were to come to pass in their own days, the verification of their predictions was oftentimes ill calculated to gain the favour of the world: and if they had been proved deceivers, they were condemned by their own law to the most dreadful punishments. Nay, they oftentimes became victims of the truths

which they declared. Yet did their Prophecies abound with terrible threatenings and severe reproofs. They had recourse to no smooth speeches, no compliances, no accommodations to the tempers and prejudices of others. They would neither palliate, nor conceal, nor refrain, when God required them to rebuke or to menace. They also executed their office in the most public manner, in the streets and in the highways, in congregations of the people, in courts and in palaces, even before their enemies, and among the Heathen themselves. Thus did Daniel prophesy before Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; and thus did Jeremiah prophesy in Egypt, Jonas in Nineveh, and Elijah before Ahab. Their predictions had also a clear, determinate, and consistent sense. They described events to come, with so many particularities of time and place, as made it scarcely possible that they should be misunderstood or misapplied. Are these the tokens of Impostors? Is such the conduct of men who, conscious of delusion, endeavour to conciliate favour, and to gain a reputation at the expense of honesty and truth? Or will the hardiest opponent of Revealed Religion affirm that the Heathen Oracles and their Priests may be put in competition with these "holy men of God," with

whom the Spirit of God was manifestly present ?

But here it may perhaps be thought, that some exception should be made in favour of those memorable predictions of the Heathen world, the *Sibylline* Oracles ; of which many of the learned have entertained a more favourable opinion, and which seem entitled to special consideration, from their reference to the great object of Scripture Prophecy.

Were we to enter at large into a discussion of this subject, we might soon be involved in a labyrinth of inquiry productive of little benefit. The result, however, of the researches that have been made into it, appears to be briefly this:—that the writings collected together and transmitted to us, as the Oracles of the Sibyls, are undoubtedly spurious, and were fabricated since the commencement of the Christian era : and that of those which are occasionally quoted by earlier writers, the authenticity is somewhat questionable.

With such imperfect documents before us, little can be affirmed with certainty respecting these remnants of antiquity. Of their claims to *Divine* Inspiration no satisfactory proof can be given. On the contrary, admitting that in these far-famed productions of old there might be something above the



reach of *human* invention or foresight, we may easily account for it, without believing the writers of them to have been gifted with the prophetic Spirit. There is abundant evidence to prove that long before the coming of Christ, the Heathen were acquainted with several of the most remarkable Scripture Prophecies, as well as with many circumstances of Jewish and Patriarchal history, which we find interwoven (though under a fabulous guise) in various parts of their writings. From that general mass of information, (however imperfect or corrupted,) which the Heathen had collected from ancient traditions, or from scattered fragments of the Sacred Records, there can be little doubt that the Books of the Sibyls were chiefly compiled. Like many other writings, therefore, of the Gentile world, they bear testimony to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, whence alone they appear to have derived whatever may be considered as proceeding from Divine suggestion.

It is unnecessary to pursue this subject farther; since with the authority of these, or any of the Heathen Oracles, we are no otherwise concerned, than to vindicate the Almighty from the charge of conniving at the delusion of his creatures, by suffering the gift of Prophecy to be applied indifferently to

the support of falsehood and of truth. In refutation of any charge of this kind, it is sufficient to prove that the Scripture Prophecies *alone* are accompanied with clear and certain tokens of Divine prescience. If these are of such a peculiar character as demonstrates them to be above any *finite* power or knowledge, they must proceed from HIM who alone is *infinite* in both. If, on the other hand, the predictions elsewhere to be found are not of this description, but discover only such a degree of foresight as is, at most, but limited and precarious; if they are also unconnected with any system of religious truth; and still more, if they appear to be in opposition to a system which has these proofs of Divinity attached to it; then must we conclude that *they are not from God*. But whether they proceed from wicked spirits or from wicked men, is rather a question of curiosity than importance. The goodness of God, in either case, stands clear of all just exception; because from whatever source they proceed, if they are of such a character as proves them not to come from God, or even that they do not necessarily come from Him, the fault is with ourselves if we give implicit credence to them as *His* Revelation.

These principles may also help us to ex-

plain certain narratives in the Scripture history, which appear at first sight to give countenance to the supposition of a real power of Divination exercised by enemies to the truth; narratives, which have often been scoffed at by Unbelievers, and sometimes urged as arguments to shew the total uncertainty of the evidence from Prophecy.

To whatever cause we may attribute these or other marvellous things mentioned in Scripture as being done by such persons; whether we ascribe them to human fraud and artifice, or to the delusions of evil spirits, it will be found that they were, in every instance, eventually *overruled* by some manifest interposition of Divine agency.

The Egyptian Sorcerers withstood Moses; but were soon deprived of their power, (whatever it might be,) and were compelled to acknowledge that they were subdued by “the finger of God<sup>f</sup>.” Simon Magus, ambitious of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and impiously supposing that it might be purchased with money, was repulsed with indignation; and being struck with a consciousness of the Apostle’s divine authority, supplicated, with terror, St. Peter’s intercession for his forgiveness. Elymas the Sorcerer, for “perverting

<sup>f</sup> Exod. viii. 19.

<sup>g</sup> Acts viii. 24.

“the right ways of the Lord,” was struck by St. Paul with instant blindness<sup>b</sup>. These were judgments inflicted on such as sought to vie with the Holy Ghost in *miraculous* powers.

Similar cases occur respecting *Soothsayings* and *Divinations*. Saul had recourse to the witch of Endor, after applying in vain to the oracles of the true God, who had, for his iniquities, forsaken him. But what was the consequence? The Sorceress became an instrument in the hands of God, of revealing the Divine counsels. She was permitted (though, as it should seem, against her will, and contrary to her expectations) to call up the spirit of Samuel from his rest, who predicted dismal events to the terrified King, in punishment of his impious desire to take counsel of Evil Spirits<sup>i</sup>. Elijah withstood the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves, in whom Ahab confided, and put them utterly to confusion, in the presence of the Monarch and his people<sup>k</sup>. Micaiah confronted others in like manner, and revealed the lying spirit which possessed them, and by which they seduced Ahab to his destruction<sup>l</sup>. Thus wherever contests were permitted between true and false prophets, the latter were

<sup>b</sup> Acts xiii. 11.

<sup>i</sup> 1 Sam. xxviii. 3—20.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Kings xviii. 17—40.

<sup>l</sup> 1 Kings xxii. 6—28.

uniformly defeated and disgraced. Again, the damsel, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, who was possessed with a spirit of divination, and brought her masters much gain by soothsaying, was exorcised by St. Paul, and totally deprived of her art<sup>m</sup>.

From these circumstances, we may venture to assert, (without peremptorily determining what particular cases were the result of human imposture, or what of demoniacal agency,) that no real and indisputable Prophecies have ever proceeded, but from the inspiration of God himself. Liars and Diviners, false Prophets, Soothsayers, and Sorcerers, are all put in Scripture on a level with each other; and there are express declarations that God would “frustrate their tokens<sup>n</sup>,” and expose their delusions to public scorn. These declarations were fully verified, whenever there appeared an occasion for manifesting His superiority over them. No instance of a competition between the true God and these agents of falsehood and impiety can be produced, where the issue of the contest was not decisive and complete. This, therefore, may satisfy us as to the point in question, respecting the power of any created beings to predict future events, without the inspiration of

<sup>m</sup> Acts xvi. 16—18.

<sup>n</sup> Isa. xlv. 25.



the Almighty, or in opposition to His Will: and hence the consequence is undeniable, that Prophecy, real and undoubted Prophecy, affords the most convincing evidence of a Divine mission.

But we have not yet done with the cavils of those who seek occasion for offence; and who will not yield to the force of the strongest arguments, so long as they can shelter themselves under any species of subterfuge.

*The double sense* of many Prophecies in the Old Testament has been made a pretext by ill-disposed men, for representing them as of uncertain meaning, and resembling the ambiguity of the Pagan Oracles. But whoever considers the subject with due attention, will perceive how little ground there is for such an accusation. The equivocations of the Heathen Oracles manifestly arose from their ignorance of future events, and from their endeavours to conceal that ignorance by such indefinite expressions as might be equally applicable to two or more events of a *contrary* description. But the double sense of the Scripture Prophecies, far from originating in any doubt or uncertainty as to the fulfilment of them in *either* sense, springs from a foreknowledge of their accomplishment in *both*; whence the predic-

tion is purposely so framed as to include *both* events, which, so far from being *contrary* to each other, are *typical* the one of the other, and are thus connected together by a mutual dependency and relation. This has often been satisfactorily proved, with respect to those Prophecies which referred, in their primary sense, to the events of the Old Testament, and, in their further and more remote signification, to those of the New: and on this double accomplishment of *some* Prophecies, is grounded our firm expectation of the completion of *others* which remain yet unfulfilled in their secondary sense, but which we justly consider as equally certain in their issue as those which are already past. So far, then, from any valid objection lying against the credibility of the Scripture Prophecies, from these seeming ambiguities of meaning; we may urge them as additional proofs of their coming from God. For, who but the Being, who is infinite in knowledge and in counsel, could so construct predictions as to give them a twofold application, to events distant from, and to *human* foresight, unconnected with each other? What power less than Divine could so frame them, as to make the accomplishment of them in one instance a solemn pledge and assurance

of their completion in another instance, of still higher and more universal importance? Where will the Scoffer find any thing like this in the artifices of Heathen Oracles to conceal their ignorance, and to impose on the credulity of mankind?

Again; Infidels oftentimes have recourse to frivolous inquiries respecting the *manner* in which the Prophets were affected by the Divine afflatus; and how they could be *assured* that it was GOD who inspired them. To these questions they seem to expect that we should reply, by a philosophical explanation of this supernatural influence. But it is absurd to suppose, that we, who have never experienced the like ourselves, should be able to explain it; or that what is confessedly *supernatural*, should be accounted for, as if it depended on *physical* causes. Neither is there any more necessity for our comprehending by what inward tokens the Prophet was enabled to know that he spake by the Spirit of God, than for our being able to conceive how any person could be conscious of his power to work Miracles. In both cases, the *effect* is all that we are concerned with; and if the Miracle were actually wrought, and the Prophecy actually fulfilled, we have all the evidence which the

nature of the case requires : and the credibility of either the Miracles or the Prophecies no more depends on our being able to conceive *how* they could be done, than on our being able ourselves to do the same.

But exceptions have sometimes been made to the *characters* of the Prophets ; whom our adversaries delight to represent either as madmen, raving about they knew not what, and uttering things at all hazards without forethought or consideration ; or as weak and melancholy enthusiasts, mistaking their own fancies and imaginations, for the dictates of the Holy Spirit. With this view, many ill-founded and false representations have been made of the dispositions and behaviour of these holy men ; and every failing recorded of them has been studiously exaggerated. But to what purpose is this profusion of calumny and ridicule ?—Among the Prophets we find men of various tempers and dispositions, as we do among other men : but no one, who duly considers the variety of the Prophecies, and their verification in plain matters of fact afterwards brought to pass, will see any reason whatever for supposing that they originated in the peculiar temper of the Prophet, or in any effort of his own imagination. For let a man's temper or imagination be

what it may, he can no more predict future events without supernatural aid, than he can remove mountains, or stop the heavenly bodies in their course. All such attempts, therefore, to lessen the weight of Prophecy are trifling and impertinent : and yet such as these are most plentifully interspersed in almost every volume of Infidelity. Nor, indeed, can we wonder that this is the case ; since though Prophecy, seriously and impartially investigated, is, perhaps, that evidence which, of all others, is the most difficult to be invalidated, yet is it that, against which, superficial and plausible objections are most easily to be raised.

To return, then, to the main question. Do the Prophecies of the Holy Scriptures afford sufficient evidence, that the Religion, which they attest, really proceeds from God ?

To enable us to answer this question in the affirmative, nothing more is necessary, than to shew, (as has already been done,) in the first place, the reality of these Prophecies, and of their accomplishment : and, in the next place, that it is impossible that they should proceed from any but God himself.

No writer of any reputation has ever attempted to deny, that the Prophets in general, whether Jewish or Christian, lived in



times long *anterior* to many of the events which they foretold. None deny the reality of the *events* likewise, in which, as we contend, those Prophecies were fulfilled. Let, then, any honest and unbiassed person take into consideration those Prophecies which relate to the personal character and office of the Messiah, to the destruction of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, the downfall of Paganism, of the rise and progress of Antichrist; let him compare these, as scrupulously and jealously as he pleases, with the best authenticated histories of ancient or modern times; and then let him say, whether it be possible to entertain a serious doubt, as to the reality of the Prophecies themselves, or the reality of their fulfilment? To shut our eyes against such proofs were wilful blindness; and (with such proofs before us) to call in question the certainty of the prophetic gift, were the height of perverseness. We have in our possession the books wherein these things were written, ages and ages before they were accomplished; and we see around us, even at the present day, proofs innumerable of their being literally fulfilled. What greater evidence can we desire, to satisfy us on this first and most important point?

Next then, we have only to inquire whether such things could proceed from any but God himself.

And here the process is short and simple. To foresee events dependent on the various contingencies of human affairs; to ascertain the characters, dispositions, and actions of persons yet unborn; to discern the hearts, the thoughts and the intentions of men, so as to decide unerringly on the conduct which they will pursue;—implies an extent of knowledge, which we cannot conceive to belong to any but the omniscient Creator and Governor of the Universe. It supposes an insight into and a control over all physical and moral agents, which must be regarded as one distinctive characteristic of *an Infinite and Omniscient Being*.

Thus it appears, that, in contending for the evidence of Prophecy, as an incontrovertible proof that the Christian Revelation has “*the witness of God*” for its support, we are making no hazardous or vague assertion; but may affirm confidently with the Apostle, that “Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

It remains only to be observed, that this evidence is exclusively our own. Heathen-

ism never made any clear and well-founded pretensions to it. Judaism has in a great measure rendered it of none effect, by such a perverse misapplication of it as now makes it, with respect to Jewish expectations, a vain and illusory scheme. Mahometanism, though unintentionally bearing witness to the truth of the Scripture Prophecies, is unsupported by one single prediction of its own; its wily Author not daring to hazard his reputation by an attempt so hopeless and easy of detection. To the *Christian* only belongs this testimony of his Faith; which possesses this peculiar advantage above all others, that it is a *growing* evidence, gathering strength by length of time, and affording from age to age fresh proofs of its Divine origin. As a majestic river expands itself more and more, the farther it removes from its source; so Prophecy, issuing from the first promise in Paradise as its fountain head, acquired additional strength and fulness, as it rolled down through successive ages; was enlarged in its course by a number of tributary streams; and will still go on increasing in extent and grandeur until it shall finally lose itself in the ocean of eternity.

## SERMON XXIII.

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2 TIMOTHY iii. 16.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*

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EVERY argument brought to prove the truth of Revealed Religion may be considered as intended ultimately to establish the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures. For if it were admitted that, notwithstanding the signs and wonders by which the Divine authority of Revelation was attested, the Scriptures which contain the records and the substance of that Revelation may nevertheless be regarded as merely human productions; all their doctrines might be deemed liable to error, and nothing would remain to be believed, but a certain number of historical facts, wonderful indeed in their kind, but of little moment to after-ages. Thus the Bible would become no more than a book of curious information, entirely deprived of its characteristic dignity and authority.

The importance of our present subject is

therefore unquestionable; since we cannot give up the Inspiration of the Scriptures, without relinquishing “the hope that is in us” as Christian Believers.

But to induce us to relinquish this hope almost without inquiry or examination, it is sometimes urged, that Revelation can only be Revelation *to the person to whom it is made*, and not *to others*: because, though God may reveal himself to any particular man, and *that* man may know assuredly that God hath so revealed himself to him, yet this is no Revelation to others, and therefore does not concern others. No one need believe such a man; or if he be believed, no one need regard what has been revealed to him; since if God *intended* that we should regard it, he would reveal it to *us* likewise.

This reasoning has, at first sight, rather the appearance of an argument to shew the *necessity of inspired writings*, for the preservation and transmission of the doctrine revealed, than of an argument against the probability of such Inspiration: since a writing, the Divine Inspiration of which is sufficiently proved, becomes, in effect, a Revelation *to every individual* into whose hands it may come, and who is assured of its Inspiration. But it is evidently brought for-



ward by Unbelievers, in order to insinuate that the Divine Inspiration of any person can never be ascertained as a fact, by any but the person himself who is so inspired : whence it would follow as a necessary consequence, that the authority of the Scriptures, as *sacred* Writings, is altogether precarious and uncertain.

But this reasoning can only stand on the assumption, that the gift of Inspiration is not capable of being proved by *external* evidence. For, if it appear that together with this gift *other* gifts were also bestowed on the inspired persons, by which sufficient testimony was afforded of their being thus supernaturally endowed, the whole objection falls to the ground. Now, this is purely a question of *fact*, and therefore to be determined by its proper evidence, not to be judged of by *à priori* reasoning.

But before we enter upon the proof of this fact, something is to be premised respecting the *extent* and *degree* of Inspiration which we believe to have been bestowed upon the Sacred Writers.

Some have deemed it necessary to suppose that every thought and word was suggested by the Holy Spirit. Others think that it might be enough, if only the substance of

the truths were thus revealed, and the Sacred Penmen were on all occasions left to express them after their own manner, and to vindicate and explain them by such reasoning as their own knowledge and understandings might supply. Both these opinions have their advantages and their disadvantages, and Unbelievers have shaped their arguments accordingly; availing themselves of the difficulties of both, and disregarding in each (as on all occasions they are wont to do) whatever is sound and valid. But, after all, Unbelievers seem to have little concern with this part of the subject: since it is only for those who admit the facts on which the authority of Revelation depends, and the certainty of the doctrines revealed, to inquire *how* the knowledge of them has been preserved and transmitted. All arguments therefore on this point, are to be considered as addressed to such persons, rather than to the professed Infidel.

In questions which do not admit of reference to our own personal observation and experience, care should be taken to avoid superfluous niceties of discussion. In the present instance, therefore, we need only contend for that kind or degree of Inspiration, which may give to the Authors of the Bible

the proper character of *Sacred Writers*, and to their books the general stamp of *Divine Authority*. Where strictly *verbal* Inspiration was necessary to that end, we cannot doubt that verbal Inspiration was granted. Where Inspiration of the *substance* of the truths, without the verbal expression, was sufficient, there we may presume that only so much was actually vouchsafed. But of this we can be but very incompetent judges; nor is it necessary that we should be able to decide upon this point, provided we can, on good grounds, establish the *authority* and the *sufficiency* of the Scriptures, collectively considered; so that it may justly be said of them, that they are “the Oracles of God,” and “are able,” as the Apostle says, “to make “us wise unto salvation<sup>a</sup>.”

Many, it is to be feared, endeavour to detract from this *entire* Inspiration of the Scriptures, that they may reserve to themselves the liberty of admitting or rejecting particular facts and doctrines, in accommodation to their own favourite opinions. But it seems impossible that the Scriptures can answer the purpose of a complete rule of faith and practice, unless they are acknowledged to be *universally* binding, and to be generally de-

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 15.

livered by one and the same authority. To suppose a *partial* Inspiration only, is, in effect, destroying the authority of the *whole*; because, as no certain criterion can be fixed, by which to judge what is really inspired, and what is not, one man might reject this portion, and another that, till none were left free from cavil and dispute.

The kind of Inspiration, therefore, which it is here intended to vindicate, is that which may properly be called a *plenary* Inspiration; denoting by that term, that the Sacred Writers *constantly* received from the Holy Spirit such a degree of assistance, as might suffice to give to *every* part of Scripture its sanction and authority as *the word of God*. To this end, it is not necessary to suppose that the Sacred Writers were on every occasion favoured with direct communications from above; but rather, that, under a divine impulse, they at sundry times committed to writing supernatural truths, the knowledge of which, having been previously revealed to them, still remained impressed upon their minds: and that a further superintendence of the Holy Spirit was vouchsafed, for the purpose only of guarding them against any undue mixture of human opinions with those Divine truths. This seems fully sufficient

to make the *whole* of Scripture binding upon us; without embarrassing the subject with needless difficulties. For, if this position be established, it will be of little moment whether we can determine in what particular cases (if in any) there was an absolute *dictation* by the Holy Spirit, or in what the writers were left to express themselves more freely and at will; since, in either case, the belief of His *superintending* influence is fully sufficient to warrant us in relying on *every part* of Scripture as sanctioned by Divine authority.

The probability of such an Inspiration cannot reasonably be denied. The truth of *Miracles* and *Prophecies* being established, why are we to question the probability of *Inspiration*, which is only another species of Miracle? The credit of the Sacred Writers as men of approved integrity and competent knowledge being also admitted, *their* assertions on this point cannot but be of considerable weight, and nothing but positive evidence to the contrary should incline us to disbelieve them. But the expediency, or rather the *necessity* of Inspiration, may be inferred from the very *design* of Revealed Religion. For, we can conceive no mode of communicating the Will of God to mankind,



but either by imparting this gift to *certain persons* for the general instruction of mankind, or by imparting it, individually and separately, to *all persons*, in all ages of the world; which latter mode of communication Unbelievers frequently insist upon as absolutely necessary for universal conviction; though how it would more effectually secure us against imposture or delusion, they do not explain.

Having endeavoured to remove these previous objections against admitting the Inspiration of the Sacred Writings; we may now proceed to inquire into the evidence of the fact.

The evidence of the Divine Inspiration of any writing may be considered as two-fold, *internal* and *external*. If it contain a clear and consistent account of doctrines or facts, which it is impossible that the writers should have known without *supernatural* information, we are led to conclude that they were communicated by Inspiration. This internal evidence will be greater or less, according to the nature and importance of the subject, the manner in which it is delivered, and other circumstances which may indicate something above the natural ability of mankind. But because any man may *pretend* to

a knowledge of things not to be known by natural means, which may nevertheless be purely the fiction of his own brain, or the reveries of his own imagination, *external* evidence is also necessary, in order to secure others (and perhaps in some cases even the inspired persons themselves) against delusion, and to prove that they who assume a right to instruct mankind in things supernatural and divine, have authority from God to do so.

Respecting the internal evidence that the *Scriptures* are divinely inspired, it is certain that doctrines and facts are therein affirmed, which, if true, could never have been the result of *human* discovery. Such are the many important truths relating to the Creation and Fall of man, his Redemption by the Son of God, and his Sanctification by the Holy Spirit; truths connected with matters of fact, which the human mind could not, by any possible exertion of its natural faculties, have found out. Upon these the whole system of Revealed Religion depends; and the great purpose of Holy Writ is to impress the conviction of them upon our minds. Either these doctrines and facts are altogether unfounded, or the knowledge of them must have been *revealed* from above. For since

no truth can be proved, without some certain data on which to ground it; and since the truths of Revelation rest on data which never can be ascertained by the light of Nature, these could only be communicated through the medium of Revelation. This will be deemed a sufficient proof of the Inspiration of the Sacred Books in general, with those who already admit that the Writers were neither Impostors nor Enthusiasts, but men deserving of credit, firmly believing what they wrote, and capable of knowing whether they had authority, or not, for what they affirmed.

But we do not depend chiefly on these *internal* marks of their origin: since it has pleased God to accompany them with such convincing *external* proofs of their proceeding from Him, as cannot be produced from any other writings.

The Writers of the Old Testament were either gifted with the power of working great and signal Miracles, as Moses and Joshua; or were of the highest order of Prophets; or were of established reputation in the Jewish Church, during the prophetic age, as men eminently endowed with some extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. The Writers of the New Testament were either Apostles, who both

prophesied and wrought miracles, “the Lord “working with them, and confirming the “word by signs following;” or they were selected by the Apostles, as persons distinguished by similar tokens of the especial favour of God.—These Writers too (let it be remembered) have recognised the sacred character of the books of the Old Testament as we now receive them. It may therefore confidently be affirmed of all the canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, that they were either written by persons who exhibited positive proofs of their acting under immediate authority from God, or were expressly sanctioned by persons of such a description.

Hence our argument for their Divine Inspiration is plain and convincing. Relying on the veracity of God as the foundation of our belief, we contend that He certainly would not have afforded such tokens of his interposition to any who, without a *commission* from Him, took upon them to declare His Will. Whether those persons *preached* or *wrote* for the instruction of others, their authority must have been the same; since if we cannot suppose that God would uphold men by miraculous powers in *preaching* falsehood in his name; neither can we be-

lieve that He would uphold them in committing falsehood to *writing*, to pass under His name and sanction from generation to generation, and to impose on the credulity of mankind. This is the general foundation on which our argument for the Inspiration of the Scriptures is grounded : and this argument extends also to their *plenary* Inspiration ; since if it clearly appear that a Writer is in *some* instances inspired, it is a proof that he is especially favoured by Almighty God, and from that proof it seems to be a necessary inference, that he would be guarded against any important errors in the *whole* of what he was to publish to the world as of Divine Authority.

But to this statement of the general grounds of our belief in the Sacred Oracles, the Unbeliever is prepared to advance many particular objections.

First, he will contend that if this representation were just, it would follow that the Scriptures must be absolutely free from all imperfection of whatever kind ; but that in the Books of the Old and New Testament many instances of inaccuracy, obscurity, and inconsistency, may be pointed out.

This objection seems to suppose (what the advocates for the plenary Inspiration of the



Scriptures are by no means obliged to admit) that the persons thus inspired must necessarily have been rendered in all respects *infallible*. But we only maintain that they were secured against *important* error ; not that in matters of less moment and unconnected with the purpose of their Divine commission they were exempt from trivial errors, incidental to human imperfection.

To judge accurately on this point, we must consider that the Sacred Writers had various sources of information besides that of Inspiration. They had the evidence of their own senses, for many facts which they record ; and they had the testimony of others, or authentic documents of history, for many more. They had also the common intellectual faculties of men, to judge of what they saw and heard. Thus far their qualifications were like those of the rest of mankind, under similar circumstances : and since we must believe that by Infinite Wisdom nothing is ever done superfluously, it is hardly to be supposed, that supernatural information would be vouchsafed of things naturally known, of facts which the Writers themselves had actually witnessed, or of any truths which they might clearly ascertain without such extraordinary help. Inspiration was subsidiary to

these natural talents. It came in aid of them; it superintended and even controlled them, whenever there was a necessity for such interposition. But we have no reason to suppose that it entirely *superseded* the use of these faculties. It might still suffer the Writers to exercise their ordinary talents in matters within their reach, and to avail themselves of human resources, in recording many of those things which “were written for our admonition.” The Holy Spirit was bestowed upon them, to “guide them into all truth<sup>b</sup> ;” that is, into all the Truth which they were commissioned to preach or to write. This purpose would be effected by enlightening their minds with knowledge otherwise unattainable, and by superintending them (as far as was needful) upon all points connected with the truth of Religion. To suppose *more* than this, is to encumber the subject with unnecessary difficulties:—to suppose *less*, is to take away our confidence in its sufficiency to “make us wise unto salvation.”

If it be asked how even this degree of Inspiration may consist with the inaccuracies which are said by some to abound in Scripture, or with those imperfections of style and language of which certain fastidious critics

<sup>b</sup> John xvi. 13.

have complained?—we might answer, that no good reason can be given why the Almighty should be expected to guard even the chosen instruments of revealing his Will from errors unconnected with the main design of the Revelation; much less why he should exert an overruling agency to perfect them in the niceties of human learning. In some instances, where peculiar accuracy was requisite, we may presume, as was before said, that a strictly verbal suggestion was given. But in other cases, it seems more probable that the substance of the truth having been divinely impressed on his mind, the writer was left at liberty to clothe it in such language as would most readily occur to him. Hence the writings of some of the Prophets and the Apostles occasionally betray the rustic simplicity of their modes of life, whilst those of others discover the air of persons bred in courts and in the schools. And hence this very diversity furnishes us with an additional argument in favour of their general Inspiration; since we can no otherwise account for that equality of knowledge and information, on subjects the most sublime and mysterious, which appears in *all* the Sacred Writings; and which gives to all of them the same dignity and authority, not-

withstanding the acknowledged disparity of their respective Authors as to the attainments of human learning.

Objections, therefore, drawn from any supposed defects in the style of the inspired Writings, are almost too futile to deserve attention. The *matter* contained in these writings rather than the *manner*, is that which proves them to be Divine. To imagine the Almighty interposing to enable men to become proficient in the art of literary composition, is frivolous and below the dignity of the subject. Were we obliged to contend even for a strictly *verbal* Inspiration of the Scriptures, such arguments as these might easily be repelled. But against an Inspiration plenary as to the *substance* only, and not as to the *words*, of Holy Writ, they weigh but as dust in the balance. Nevertheless, the greater part of these cavils betray as much want of taste as of candour; since those who are best qualified to judge of these compositions have been most ready to ascribe to them a very high degree of sublimity and beauty.

But farther; respecting the *argumentative* talents of the Sacred Writers, Infidels are wont to express much dissatisfaction. Yet here their objections not unfrequently invali-

date each other. Sometimes we are told<sup>c</sup>, that in the Scriptures doctrines are laid down and proved according to the common mode of human ratiocination; and therefore that they need not be regarded as of more than human authority. At other times, it is insinuated<sup>d</sup> that Scripture cannot come from God, because its doctrines are *not* argumentatively proved, nor addressed to us as reasonable beings.

To both these objections the Believer has a ready answer. The gift of Inspiration, though it destroys not men's reasoning faculties, does not appeal to human wisdom for proof of the truth of its communications. It is enough for those to whom such communications are made, to know that *they come from God*, without knowing the *reasons* on which they are founded. Whatever God is pleased thus to impart may become a proper subject of argumentative discussion, if He vouchsafe to communicate also the grounds and reasons on which it is founded. But if He *withhold* these reasons, and deliver it only as a truth to be believed *on His authority*, such reasoning is not absolutely necessary, although it may sometimes be used with propriety and

<sup>c</sup> See Spinoza, and others.

<sup>d</sup> See "Christianity not founded on Argument."



effect, in answer to the objections of gain-sayers. There appear indeed to be no better grounds for expecting *argumentative*, than *verbal* Inspiration. One as well as the other might be vouchsafed, as necessity arose; and no farther. And hence, perhaps, it is, that the inspired Writers sometimes expatiate largely on the truths revealed, and vindicate them by a variety of arguments; and at other times simply declare them on the authority of Him by whom they were revealed. It is for the Almighty to bestow His communications in such *measure* as He sees fit; requiring (in this as in other cases) submission to His will and wisdom, without irreverent demands for farther information.

“But how,” says the Objector, “can the seeming *contradictions* of Scripture be reconciled with the belief of their plenary Inspiration?”

If, indeed, there were any contradictions or inconsistencies in the Sacred Writings, respecting matters on which it behoves us to obtain precise information, it would be in vain to undertake their defence. But none of such a kind have ever been produced: since in all passages relating either to our faith or practice, it requires only a careful consideration to adjust any seeming contra-

rieties of expression. But most of those which are brought forward to serve the purposes of Infidelity, relate to minute chronological difficulties, or to unimportant circumstances of historical narrative, with which it little concerns us to be more accurately acquainted, and which in no respect affect the credibility of the general history. Few, however, if any of these, are found to be incapable of some consistent and satisfactory solution. But supposing them not to admit of this, we should not be warranted in thence impugning the Divine authority of Holy Writ; unless it could be shewn that the Almighty, in imparting the gift of Inspiration for certain especial purposes, became thereby pledged to bestow it likewise for purposes of an inferior kind, and wholly unnecessary to the great end in view.

Moreover, it is always to be remembered, that when we speak of the Scriptures as divinely inspired, we speak of the *original* Writings, not of the *Versions* or *Copies* of them taken in later times. And although we have the fullest assurance, that neither in these Copies, nor in those Versions, any considerable alteration has been made, or any error crept in, which can materially deprave the sense, or throw the slightest shade of un-

certainty over any truth which it is necessary for us to understand; yet we may reasonably suppose, that many, if not all, of the seeming inconsistencies or inaccuracies complained of by our Adversaries, are to be attributed to Copyists and Translators, rather than to the original Writers. It has, however, been clearly and satisfactorily proved by a most consummate Critic of our own country<sup>c</sup>, that there are much fewer errors even of this kind in the Copies and Versions handed down to us of the Sacred Writings, than in those of any other ancient authors; and also, that none of these errors are of real importance.

But when we have endeavoured to blunt the edge of these weapons directed against the Divine Authority of the Sacred Writings, we are still frequently assailed with others of a different kind. It is insinuated that we are contending for what is *unnecessary* at least, and even unworthy of the Divine interference; that whatever need there might be for such aid, in matters of knowledge too wonderful and excellent for man to attain unto, yet no such necessity can be alleged on *other* topics; and that, therefore, it is pressing the argument too far, to require the *whole* to

<sup>c</sup> Bentley's Phileleutherus Lipsiensis.

be revered as *the word of God*. In particular, it is observed that a very considerable portion of it consists of *moral* or *historical* writings, which can hardly be considered as above the level of human compositions.

Concerning the question, whether a complete system of *moral* duty be discoverable or was ever actually discovered by the light of Nature, without the aid of Revelation, much has already been advanced which need not be here repeated :—and whether *such* a system as that revealed in the *Scriptures* is to be found in any writings not borrowed from *them*, is a question which no impartial inquirer will hesitate to determine in the negative. But without instituting inquiries of this kind, it is sufficient to observe, that Inspiration was evidently necessary to give to *moral* precepts a competent *sanction*, and to authorize the Sacred Writers to deliver them *in the name of God*. No mere Philosopher could ever say, as the Prophets and the Apostles did, “Hear ye the word of the Lord,” or, “This is the will of God.” Yet without this authority, wherein would the *Scriptures* have been more efficacious than the writings of Heathen Philosophers? or what *Law* would mankind have had, which could be imperative on the conscience? The necessity, therefore,

of Inspiration in *this* case is hardly less evident than in the revelation of doctrines confessedly beyond the reach of human discovery.

Respecting the Inspiration of the *historical* parts of Scripture, similar observations may be made. In a simple narrative of facts, it may seem, indeed, that nothing more is requisite than the testimony of credible witnesses, or the production of authentic records. But there are *some* portions of Scripture History relating to facts of which it seems impossible that the Writers could have had a clear and certain knowledge, without more than human information. And, exclusively of these, since most of the events recorded have a greater or a less degree of connection with the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of his kingdom, some extraordinary *sanction* appears necessary to establish the authority of the historical, as well as of the moral and doctrinal parts of Scripture. If indeed there be sufficient evidence that *any* part of these Writings was divinely inspired, it cannot reasonably be doubted that on *every* occasion the Sacred Penmen wrote under the superintendence and direction of the same Spirit, unless they have declared to the contrary: which is so



far from being the case, that whether they write on matters of history, of doctrine, or of morals, we find them expressing themselves in the same authoritative language.

The great object, indeed, in vindicating the Scriptures against cavils of this kind, is not so much to ascertain when the Authors wrote by the especial and immediate suggestion of the Holy Spirit, and when they did not, as to establish in general the Divine *authority* of their writings. This purpose seems to be sufficiently attained, by proving them to have been divinely *commissioned* to write these things for our learning; whatever we may determine as to their being at all times, and in the strictest acceptation of the word, divinely *inspired*. For, hence it will follow, that although, in several instances, it should seem to us that the natural faculties of the Writers might be sufficient for the purpose, yet we must attach so much *authority* even to those passages, as belongs to men evidently endowed with supernatural powers.

By attending to this distinction, we may, perhaps, be better able to repel many injurious reflections on Scripture, and to defend its sacred character in every point, without supposing such a control over the Writers,

as would seem to preclude them from the use of their natural faculties.

For example: when St. Paul directed Timothy to bring with him the cloak and the parchments from Troas; and when he recommended him to take a little wine for his stomach's sake; we can hardly, perhaps, conceive a special interposition of the Holy Ghost necessary, to suggest to him matters of such ordinary concern. Nevertheless, even *these* are admonitions of a *divinely inspired* Apostle, of one to whom had been "made "known by Revelation the mystery of the "Gospel<sup>f</sup>." They therefore carry in them a weight far beyond that of an *ordinary* Teacher or Historian; and, under certain circumstances, they might become highly important as lessons of instruction. For, if a Fanatic in these days were to recommend ascetic austerities, or to preach up seclusion from the world and an absolute renunciation of its enjoyments, we should be fully warranted in arguing from these passages against his extravagant doctrines; and we might urge the authority of *an inspired Apostle*, to discountenance his absurdities, and to prove them repugnant to *the word of God*. This may serve as an illustration of what is here

<sup>f</sup> Ephes. iii. 3.

affirmed, that the *authority* of Scripture extends to *every part* of it; so that though all Scripture is not revelation of mysterious truths, or of moral precepts, and therefore may not be all equally important; yet it is all so far written under the guidance or control of the Holy Spirit, as to become, in the language of the Apostle, “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works<sup>g</sup>.” This being admitted, all inquiries whether in this or that particular instance an immediate suggestion of the Holy Spirit was vouchsafed, or the Writer was permitted to deliver the result of his own judgment and observation, become merely curious and unnecessary speculations.

The substance, then, of our argument for the plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures is this.—God having bestowed on the Writers such extraordinary and supernatural gifts as could only be derived from Him, we cannot but suppose those persons to have been commissioned by Him to declare His Will. Hence we infer, that, in the execution of that purpose, whether by preaching or by writing,

<sup>g</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

He would secure them against important error of every kind, by such suggestion, superintendency, or control, as should give to what they delivered the stamp of Divine authority. And although God might not see fit to supersede the use of their natural talents or their acquired knowledge, or to infuse into them fresh means of information when those which they already had were sufficient; yet since they had received especial tokens of His favour and assistance, and since no rule is afforded us to distinguish between the result of their natural and supernatural powers, we are necessarily led to conclude, that it was the Will of the Almighty that *all* their writings should be received as *His Word*. Whatever theories, therefore, we may adopt, respecting the mode, the kind, or the degree of Inspiration, with which they were gifted, we cannot question the Divine authority of these writings, without virtually questioning those miraculous evidences by which they were attested.

But we are not yet entirely extricated from the toils of the Adversary; who never fails to remind us that Inspiration has been continually pretended to by Enthusiasts and Impostors: by men yielding to the reveries of wild imagination, or artfully availing them-

selves of the credulity of mankind, to make the grossest absurdities pass for the suggestions of heavenly wisdom. For proof of this, we are frequently referred to Pagan divinations; to Legislators of old, practising benevolent artifices upon mankind for their benefit and instruction; to the mystical writings of reputed Sages; to Mahomet, delivering the Koran as the perfect and entire composition of the Almighty; to Fanatics in Christian countries, acting the most abominable extravagances under the persuasion of a Divine afflatus; to designing Hypocrites, artfully employing such pretences for interested, factious, or ambitious purposes; and to a multitude of Sects in modern times, whose claims to Inspiration are exploded as absurd and groundless, by considerate men. How, then, it is asked, shall we be secured against error; and how shall we draw the line between true and false Inspiration, so as effectually to separate the one from the other?

If the foregoing remarks on the certainty of *Scripture* Inspiration be well-founded, it will not be difficult to establish such a criterion as is here demanded.

The evidence of *Miracles*, or of *Prophecy*, has been stated as indispensably necessary, to give validity to any claims of Inspiration:



and with evidence of this kind no writings but those of the Bible have ever yet been accompanied. Moses gave ample proofs of his pretensions to this gift, by the Miracles which he performed. All the Sacred Writers, from Moses to Malachi, appear to have been favoured with some *external* tokens of the Divine assistants, or, at least, to have received the sanction of those who were so. Every book of the *Old* Testament is also attested, as of Divine authority, by the Writers of the *New* ; so that if we are convinced of the Inspiration of the latter, no doubt can be entertained of that of the former. But the Writers of the New Testament abundantly proved *their* claim to it by Miracles and Prophecies, as well as by the extraordinary wisdom and knowledge with which they discoursed on topics far beyond the highest reach of human learning, and more especially beyond that of simple and unlettered men. St. Paul, in particular, (who, more than any other of the Sacred Writers, has discoursed at large on the mysterious points of the Christian Faith,) began to teach and to preach the Gospel, without being taught even its first rudiments by *human* instruction, and without any communication with the Apostles. He neither “received it of man,” neither was he “taught

“ it, but by the revelation of Christ Jesus<sup>h</sup>.” With respect to the other Apostles, *the gift of tongues* was a sufficient evidence of their being “ *taught of God*,” and authorized by Him to teach the rest of mankind. How then can we doubt either of *their* Inspiration, or of the Inspiration of all those books which *they* regarded as of Divine authority ; especially when we consider, that among the miraculous gifts bestowed on the Apostles, was that of “ *discerning of Spirits*<sup>i</sup>,” by which they were enabled to know what Teachers or Writers made true or false pretensions to this extraordinary illumination ? Thus the Divine authority of the whole Canon of Scripture is rendered complete ; and we are secured against delusion, in relying upon it as the word of God.

But what evidence of this kind can be brought to prove the Inspiration of any *other* writings ? What attestation was ever given to the Pagan Oracles and Divinations ? or where is there one well-authenticated Miracle to support them ? What external proofs were adduced by Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Lycurgus, or Numa, of their divine commission to legislate for mankind ? Where do we find any

<sup>h</sup> Gal. i. 12. see also to the end of the chapter.

<sup>i</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 10.

such testimonies to the profound and unintelligible reveries, which the Mystics and Platonists would fain have passed upon the world as works of more than human composition? How did Mahomet prove the divinity of the Koran delivered out chapter by chapter as dictated, even to the very letter of it, by the Almighty, and yet so irreconcilable with itself that the Prophet was driven, in apologizing for its defects, virtually to charge its Divine Author with ignorance and imperfection? Or, if we descend to Fanatics of later times, what tokens do we find to confirm their pretensions? and to what end and purpose do their supposed Inspirations tend?—Among the multitudes of Enthusiasts and Impostors with which the Christian world has been infested, ever since the Reformation, and even in the earliest ages of Christianity, nothing is upon record to shew that their preachings or their writings proceeded from the Spirit of God; nor have any proofs been given of their authority from Him to promulge them. There would therefore be little danger of our being misled by any such false pretenders, did we exercise our understandings as men, and bring their claims to a proper test.

Still we cannot but greatly lament the frequent prevalence of these delusions, which,

among the ignorant and undiscerning multitude, will always be but too successful. The mischief hence arising to the cause of Revelation itself is incalculably great. For, he who pretends to an extraordinary intercourse with God, and to a commission to reveal His Will, without producing the proper *outward* evidence of his being so especially favoured, not only deludes many into false and dangerous notions of Religion, but leads others into Scepticism, Infidelity, and Atheism, by confounding truth with error, certainty with uncertainty, and making it impossible (if *his* claims were admitted) to discriminate between real and pretended Revelations from God. By whatever views and intentions such a person may be actuated, or under whatever disguise he may conceal his designs, he is promoting in the most effectual manner the cause of the great Enemy of our Salvation.

In these our days, therefore, (when the Adversary is employed in every way to deprive us of our Christian hope,) it behoves us carefully to guard against these *secret* artifices to sap the foundation of our Faith. If claims to extraordinary Inspiration be once admitted without *external* evidence to prove them, it is impossible that the cause of Truth can be maintained: an entrance is opened to

every deceit and every error that can take possession of the human mind ; and we shall be left to steer our course between the dangerous rocks of Enthusiasm on the one hand, and Infidelity on the other, without rudder or compass, liable every moment to make shipwreck of our Faith.

The age of *extraordinary* Inspiration is (we may venture to affirm) gone by, with that of Miracles and Prophecy : and never (as far as we can find) have these been separated from each other, but have invariably gone hand in hand, bearing joint testimony to the truth. The necessity of *all* these, for the introduction and establishment of the Gospel, is manifest. But no necessity for either of them can be shewn, now that the great work of Revelation is completed, and *the written Oracles of God* are transmitted to us, containing the fullest declaration of the Divine Will. To what purpose indeed can any one *now* covet this peculiar gift ? If he intend not to preach new and “*strange doctrines*,” we can perceive no *need* of extraordinary Inspiration : and if he *do* intend to preach such, surely we must have stronger evidence than his own confident *assertions* of Inspiration, or the credulity of his followers, to induce us to give up our Bibles, and commit our-



selves to his guidance. In either case it is necessary that he shew us his *credentials*, and produce such clear and indisputable testimony of his *commission* as may warrant us in admitting his claims. By this rule let us “try “ the spirits, whether they are of God<sup>k</sup> :” and we shall soon find that every spirit of error and delusion will vanish away, and the Sacred Writers *alone* abide the scrutiny.

Thus has it been endeavoured to clear this important subject from some objections, to which the perverseness of the Infidel or the presumption of the Enthusiast may have rendered it liable. Several of these objections (like those urged against Miracles and Prophecies) strike rather at the wisdom and goodness of God in his mode of bestowing the gift of Inspiration, than at the reality of the gift itself. For, whatever ingenuity may be exercised in cavilling at the supposed *imperfections* of the Sacred Writings, if it be nevertheless impossible to set aside the proofs of their being written by persons who produced positive external evidence of their acting under the *Divine* sanction and direction, all such cavils must be regarded as indirect attacks on HIM whose word they profess to be; nor can we discredit *their* author-

<sup>k</sup> 1 John iv. 1.

ity and truth, without impeaching Hrs. Those objections, on the other hand, which are urged from the pretensions of Enthusiasts and Impostors, are found to be equally weak and futile; because it is easy to distinguish between true and false claims to Inspiration, if we carefully attend to the *external* evidences with which it is accompanied. Deceivers will never be able to endure so unequivocal a test; and it must always be our own fault, if we do not bring them to this trial.

Having arrived at an assurance that we are in possession of the infallible Word of Truth, the rule of our Faith and Practice, by conforming to which we cannot fail of attaining Eternal Life; our controversy with Unbelievers seems to be brought to a termination. But since, in the prosecution of that controversy, a very wide and extensive range has been taken, it may be useful to cast a retrospective eye on the ground that has been traversed, and to consider what conclusions may be drawn from such a survey, either for the “convincing of gainsayers,” or for the confirmation of our own Faith. To this object the concluding Lecture will be directed. In the mean while, may God give

his blessing on our endeavours (however imperfect) to vindicate His Sacred Truth, and dispose us to receive with meekness “the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls<sup>1</sup>!”


<sup>1</sup> James i. 21.

## SERMON XXIV.



1 THESSALONIANS iv. 8.

*He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but  
God.*



To a truly benevolent mind there is nothing so painful as the contemplation of Infidelity. Whatever evils men may be called upon to endure, none is comparable to the burden of Sin:—and whatever sins may oppress the wounded spirit, none are absolutely remediless but wilful and obstinate Unbelief. For our recovery from those offences into which we are betrayed by “the lust of the flesh, “the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” a way is always open through the hope which is in Christ Jesus. But for a deliberate and determined rejection of that hope; for that “evil heart of unbelief,” which sets at nought the means provided for its restoration to the Divine favour; where are we to look for a

remedy? Who must not tremble, to see a fellow-creature thus rush on perdition; insensible of his danger, or resolutely bent on encountering it, though warned, on every side, of its fatal consequences?

In proportion, then, as we shudder at the thought of so dreadful an enormity, we shall be reluctant in supposing that any whom we desire to love as brethren are chargeable with its guilt. Hence, perhaps, arises a readiness in many to apologize for offences of this description, and to regard Infidelity as a venial error springing from the frailties incidental to human nature, which will be easily overlooked by Him who is not “extreme to mark what is done amiss.”

Nevertheless, whatever that boasted *liberality of sentiment*, (or, rather, that indifference to truth,) which distinguishes the present age, may induce some to think on this subject; Unbelief is certainly of all offences the most to be dreaded, because, from its very nature, it precludes our performance of those *conditions*, on which alone we can be assured that *any* offence is remissible. So far, therefore, is it from being an act of real charity or kindness, to palliate this offence, or to suffer men to remain at ease in the commission of it, that we cannot more strongly



testify our good-will towards men, than by warning them of its danger, and urging every argument of intimidation as well as of persuasion, to bring them to a better sense of their condition. “Knowing the terror of “the Lord we persuade men<sup>a</sup>.”

In proof that all hostility to Revealed Religion originates in some predisposition to oppose the Divine Will; that they who reject it, virtually reject God; and that they who despise his authorized messengers, or arraign the wisdom, expediency, and goodness of the message delivered, do in effect despise *Him*, and impeach *His* attributes;—abundant evidence may be collected from the view which has already been taken of the rise and progress of Infidelity, and of the principles and reasonings by which it is usually supported.

If it be true (as both historical evidence and the reason of the thing, we have seen, concur to prove) that from the beginning man was instructed in Religious Truth by immediate Revelation from God; it follows, that in the earliest ages of the world *Unbelief* must have involved in it the sin of direct *Apostasy*; because no man could in the first instance have become an Infidel, with-

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. v. 11.

out knowingly and wilfully departing from God and renouncing obedience to His Will. In this guilt therefore, the first inventors and promoters of *Paganism* (which formed the great mass of Infidelity before the coming of Christ) appear to have been deeply implicated ; since Paganism had evidently no foundation of its own, but was constructed upon a gross and wilful perversion of a system previously revealed by the Almighty. An outline of the facts and arguments on which this position is grounded has already been given ; and from these the conclusion seems to be unavoidable, that such a departure from the *known* will of God, at whatever period it commenced, must have had its *origin* in inexcusable and presumptuous impiety.

The degree of culpability chargeable upon those who lived in *succeeding* times, will vary according to the means and opportunities which they appear to have had, of recovering the knowledge which had been lost or despised ; and of discriminating between the pretensions of true and false Religion. As the generality of mankind might be little able to appreciate the strength of such pretensions ; in process of time error would become so prevalent, and truth so obscured and

defaced, as to baffle the researches even of inquisitive and thinking men. We are therefore the less surprised at the extensive progress of false Religion, and are disposed to feel pity rather than indignation for the multitudes who espoused its cause. This is the best and, perhaps, the only apology which can be made for the errors of the Gentile world, between the Patriarchal and Christian ages; which, however, ought not to diminish our abhorrence of that spirit of impiety and disobedience, which must have been the prime cause of error; and which was continually discernible through its progress, as well as at its commencement.

But, when we view the Gentile world as visited by "the day-spring from on high," arising to dispel the darkness with which it had so long been covered, we cease to feel that compassion for the ignorance and brutishness of mankind, of which they might before that period have been regarded as not undeserving objects. Such were the clear and luminous proofs of Divine authority, displayed in the introduction and establishment of the Gospel Dispensation; that we can hardly conceive any opposition to it to have been *entirely* free from the guilt of presumptuous opposition to the Divine Will. To

both Jews and Gentiles this observation is applicable; both being implicated in the same *kind* if not in the same *degree* of guilt, with respect to their contempt of the evidences of Christianity.

Under this new dispensation, all people to whom the tidings of Salvation were declared were blest with no less favourable an opportunity of knowing the Divine Will, than those to whom God revealed himself in the earliest Patriarchal ages, before any apostasy had taken place: and if, after having escaped the pollutions of Superstition, Idolatry, and Atheism, they were again entangled therein and overcome, (notwithstanding the *sufficiency* of evidence vouchsafed to them of the authority of the Revelation,) the effect could only be produced, in this as in the former instance, by a wilful departure from God. Hence it follows, that whoever acted the part of *seducers* from the profession of the Gospel, in the primitive ages of Christianity, were virtually *Apostates* from the truth; and, if Apostates, then men “despising God,” and presumptuously forsaking Him, to follow their own imaginations. Whatever, therefore, may be our compassion and solicitude for the inhabitants of various countries throughout the habitable globe, who are *now* “sitting in

“darkness and in the shadow of death;” when we come to reflect upon the *causes* of this their deplorable condition, we must not forget that had there not been in *former* times such a *wilful* departure from the Faith, and also among many in *after* times a very culpable neglect of the means and opportunities vouchsafed to them for recovery from their errors, this could never have happened unto them.

In the same manner it behoves us to examine the history of Religion and Infidelity, in *every* stage of their respective progress; because, without duly considering the *circumstances* under which falsehood and error have been introduced, we can neither justly appreciate the degree and extent of guilt which have been incurred in its introduction, nor sufficiently account for the prevalence of so vast an evil.

It is, indeed, manifest that whenever Infidelity has assumed any *new* appearance, or has drawn off greater multitudes than usual from the profession of the Gospel, it has always exhibited some extraordinary indications of an *intentional* opposition to the declared Will of God.

Of this we have a striking instance in the



attempts of Heathen Philosophers, in the second and third centuries, to set up the pretensions of Apollonius and others against those of Christ and his Apostles ; pretensions, which the very persons who upheld them most strenuously could not but *know* to originate in imposture. Every endeavour to *refine* Paganism, and to gloss over its absurdities by mystical expositions, in order to recommend it to those whom the preaching of the Gospel had rendered more inaccessible to gross delusion, may also be considered as an attempt to deceive mankind, on the part of such as perfectly well knew that they were giving a false colour to a system which it was impossible to uphold upon any sound and solid principles.

The Religion of Mahomet affords another proof of the same kind. Whatever its insidious Author might pretend, it was evidently designed to seduce men from the Christian Faith ; since, though it sometimes appears to recognise the Divine authority of the Gospel, it nevertheless endeavours with the utmost malevolence to effect its overthrow. Accordingly, even at this day, no Unbelievers appear to be more obstinately determined to resist every argument and every kind of evidence

which can be set before them in proof of the Gospel, than the disciples of this shameless Impostor.

In the Middle Ages, when Europe was once more enveloped in almost Heathenish ignorance and barbarism, men were by no means free from the guilt of “despising God,” in their rejection or corruption of the Gospel. Whoever considers the history of Scholastic Theology in those times, and the continual inroads which were made upon the Christian Faith by philosophical speculations, will perceive that it was not *ignorance* alone which then promoted either superstition or infidelity; but a perversion of considerable knowledge, talents, and ingenuity, to these pernicious purposes; and that men grew daring in impiety, licentious in speculation, and lovers of disputation more than lovers of truth, from an overweening conceit of their own powers, and a contempt, or indifference, at least, for the authority of God’s word. This is sufficiently proved by the astonishing progress of both speculative and practical Atheism, during that period, even in the very heart of Christendom.

But, perhaps, modern times have still more to answer for in this respect than any preceding ages. Since the revival and general

diffusion of literature in Europe, and more especially since the great work of the Protestant Reformation has been effected, the Adversaries of our Faith continually boast of the vast accessions which have been made to knowledge, both historical and scientific; of the more correct habits of reasoning which have been acquired; and of the removal of numberless prejudices which had heretofore been insuperable obstacles to the attainment of Truth. Supposing this to be the case, might it not have been expected that a reverence for the Almighty, and an earnest desire to know and obey His Will, would have increased in proportion? But how different has been the effect! Who ever appeared to entertain less fear of offending God, or less respect for his injunctions, than many of those *Deists* (as they affectedly call themselves) who have been employed in framing religious systems of their own invention, for the express purpose of superseding Divine Revelation? Have not their objections to Revealed Religion been almost exclusively grounded on the nature and tendency of its system, which (without examining the external evidences of its coming from God) they will persist in rejecting, as unworthy of acceptance by men of reason and Philosophers?

And is not this, in its very principle, to “despise God,” by opposing the human understanding to the Divine? As to the *Scoffers* of these last days, of whom so many have earned to themselves infamy and abhorrence, it can hardly be necessary to bring particular instances in proof of their irreverence towards God himself, no less than towards the Gospel which they calumniate.

But further evidence of the perverse and evil dispositions of Unbelievers may be collected, in the next place, from the examination which has been entered into of their principles and reasonings on the subject of Revealed Religion.

In their reasonings *à priori* on this subject, they display a presumption and arrogance, irreconcilable with that submission to the Supreme Being which is the first and most obvious duty of man. It seems indeed impossible that any argument of this kind against the truth or credibility of Revelation can be fairly maintained, but upon the supposition that man is competent to sit in judgment upon his Creator, and is neither bound to believe in, nor to obey him, unless the things enjoined for his belief and practice be entirely consonant with his own arbitrary opinions of rectitude and wisdom.

This sort of *will-worship* (if the term may be so applied) is the very foundation of what is called Natural Religion, as put in opposition to Revealed. But when men insist upon the sufficiency of the light of Nature to instruct them in Religious Truth, or upon the incredibility of Revelation because it transcends the limits of their natural knowledge, and may be in some respects difficult to reconcile with the suggestions of unenlightened reason ; what is this, in effect, but to say that God's ways must necessarily be as their ways, and His thoughts as their thoughts ; and that they will not rely upon *His Word* for the truth of any assertion, even on subjects concerning which it is impossible that they should have any certain knowledge beyond that which He vouchsafes to afford them ? If then sufficient arguments have been brought, to prove that man is unable to frame a Religion for himself, that no human science can lead him to a knowledge of *divine* things ; that Faith in God's word can alone guide him safely in his researches after spiritual Truth ; and that when Truth is thus found, it is the highest act of Reason to acquiesce in it implicitly and without reserve ; it will necessarily follow, that no man who is aware of these arguments can reject Revealed Re-



ligion, on the ground of any alleged in expediency, inutility, or unfitness, without a violation of the first duty which a creature owes to his Creator, and without treating the Divine wisdom and authority as inferior to his own.

Yet so it is, that this reasoning *à priori* has been the constant resort of Unbelievers, both in ancient and modern times. The Jews of old, and the Heathen in the earliest ages of Christianity, had little else to urge in excuse for their obstinacy, in resisting the evidences of the Gospel. The *facts* on which the credibility of the Gospel is founded, were then too recent and of too great notoriety, to admit a hope that any attempt to overthrow them would be successful. The Jews, therefore, assailed Christianity with objections and cavils, not against the external *evidences* of its Divine authority, but against the spirit and tendency of its system. They scoffed, derided, blasphemed, and persecuted; and justified their outrages by affected zeal for the law of Moses, which, according to their reasoning, even God himself had no authority to repeal. Thus did they set up their own wisdom, against that of the acknowledged Author of their own Religion; and restrict Him to a compliance with their pre-

judices and prepossessions. The Heathen Unbelievers, on the other hand, were too proud to endure that even those who were manifestly gifted with Divine power should call the wisdom of their Philosophy in question, or dictate any thing repugnant to their conceits. Hence *they* also levelled their arguments, not against the *facts* of the Gospel, but against its doctrines and its professors; leaving untouched the most indisputable proofs of its being the work of God. In this respect, both Jews and Heathens resembled many of the Philosophical Unbelievers of modern times; who think it sufficient to oppose abstract reasoning to positive fact, and to make the human understanding the measure of Divine Truth.

Nor do we find either sounder argument or less presumption, in the manner in which Unbelievers usually apply to reasoning *à posteriori*, for the overthrow of Revealed Religion.

The external evidences both of the Jewish and of the Christian Religion are undoubtedly capable of like proof with other matters of fact; and ought to be judged of by a similar mode of reasoning. But, instead of deciding upon *them* as upon *other* facts, by the *senses* and *testimony* of mankind;

attempts are continually made to refute them upon grounds, which if admitted as valid would destroy the credibility of every historical event upon record, and make us sceptical concerning the most incontrovertible facts. This perverse species of reasoning is frequently resorted to in treating of the *ordinary* occurrences of Scripture history ; but still more in canvassing those *extraordinary* transactions, wherein the power, and wisdom, and direct interposition of the Almighty are concerned. On such occasions, the Infidel is oftentimes not contented with barely raising doubts and suspicions as to the fidelity of the historian ; but boldly insists upon the improbability, nay, the impossibility, of the fact, on the ground that every thing *preternatural* is, *per se*, *incredible*, and incapable of rational proof. Frequent instances of this mode of assailing Revealed Religion have been pointed out, in considering the arguments of Unbelievers against Miracles, Prophecy, and Inspiration.

Reasoning of this kind against the *facts* of Revelation, is scarcely less presumptuous or absurd than reasoning *à priori* against its *doctrines* and its *system*. For, if we refuse to believe the “cloud of witnesses” by which the Gospel is attested ; if we despise those his-

torical evidences by which God had thought fit to introduce, establish, and perpetuate the knowledge of His Will, and by which we are, and must be, guided in our researches after the truth of any matter of fact whatsoever ;— what do we, in effect, but arraign the wisdom of his providence ; virtually accusing him of inefficiency in the means used for the communication of this knowledge, or of conniving at the absolute delusion of his creatures ?

The *impiety* of such arguments is manifest ; and when we further take into consideration the many open invectives, groundless accusations, and even palpable falsehoods, with which these arguments are oftentimes accompanied, it seems difficult, even for Charity herself to acquit those by whom they are urged of the charge of “despising God.”

But the miserable sophistry of Unbelievers will be further apparent, when we consider the strange *inconsistencies* of reasoning, into which they are frequently driven, by their endeavours, at all hazards, to throw some doubts on the credibility of Revelation.

Many of these writers contend that Revelation is *unnecessary*, because every truth which it contains is *discoverable* by human Reason : while others affirm that it is *incredible*, because most of its truths are *repugnant*

to human Reason. Sometimes it is maintained that Christianity is *not mysterious*; sometimes, that it is *so mysterious* as to be irreconcilable with every notion we can form of truth or probability. The *utility* or *inutility* of Revelation is also assumed at pleasure, as the basis of arguments to prove its falsehood. *Enthusiasm* is the main charge alleged against it by some Unbelievers; *Imposture*, by others. Christianity, according to certain Deistical writers, ought not to be received, because it was *rejected by the Jews*, who were the fittest judges of its pretensions: while, according to others, its having been *fabricated by Jews* renders it altogether unworthy of acceptance. The Miracles of the Gospel were admitted to be *real facts*, by the Jews and Heathen who lived in or near to the time when they were performed, but were attributed to the agency of Evil Spirits: whilst the same facts, though attested thus by enemies as well as friends, are continually questioned, nay denied, by Philosophers of the present day; who, disclaiming all belief in the agency or even the existence of Evil Spirits, would ridicule the absurdity of ascribing them to such a cause. Modern Unbelievers, again, are divided in their opinions on this matter; some regarding the things said to have been done as



merely *allegorical* or *fabulous* legends ; others as deceptions imposing upon the senses of mankind. In like manner, Miracles, Prophecies, and Inspiration, have at one time been treated as absolutely impossible and incapable of proof : whilst at other times it has been thought expedient to admit their possibility, and to acknowledge them to be the only proper credentials of Divine Revelation, in order to raise an argument from thence that this evidence ought to be continued through all ages for the conviction of mankind, and to urge the want of this continuance of miraculous evidence in excuse for not believing the testimony of former times. Again ; some opponents of Revealed Religion, finding it impossible to fix upon the Sacred Writers or the first Preachers of Christianity any sinister motives, acknowledge them to have been men of pure and upright intentions, and exceedingly zealous in doing good to mankind : while others, by the most injurious suspicions, endeavour to stigmatize them as artful and designing persons wilfully deceiving mankind, and, under the mask of pious zeal, forwarding some interested and ambitious views. In the same spirit of contradiction, attempts are often made to impeach the truth of the Scriptures, from some slight variations

in the narratives of the Sacred Writers, which are magnified into proofs of such *dissonance* and *contrariety* as indicate their absolute falsehood : while, on the other hand, from the general *harmony* which is found to subsist between them as to every important fact or doctrine, hints are occasionally thrown out of a possible confederacy among these Writers to deceive mankind.

Whoever attentively considers these features of inconsistency in the works of Infidels, will be led to conclude, either that their opposition to Revealed Religion is incapable of being vindicated on any sound and rational principles, or that it has hitherto had the misfortune to be conducted by very weak and injudicious Advocates. But since it will hardly be denied by any, (much less by Infidels themselves,) that among those who have laboured in their cause there have been some persons well able to maintain it, if it had admitted of such support as would abide the test of solid reasoning ; and since we see men whose talents are successfully exerted in *other* pursuits, exposing themselves on *this* subject only to the censure of irreconcilable contradiction of each other and even of themselves ;—what can we infer, but that the cause itself is indefensible ?

If now, on the other hand, we consider how effectually these manifold objections may be repelled by the Advocates of Revealed Religion without any perplexity or confusion, we shall have still further confirmation of the perverseness of its Opponents.

The arguments by which Unbelievers assail our Faith are, as we have seen, not merely various, but many of them *contradictory* to each other:—but those by which Believers defend it are, however diversified, still *consistent*.

Thus, when the Infidel charges Christianity at one time with *Enthusiasm*, and at another with *Imposture*, *both* these charges cannot possibly be true; and in proportion as he establishes, or seems to establish the one, he must overthrow or weaken the other. But the Christian, in *disproving* either of them, gives no advantage to the other, since the very same arguments which prove the truth of the Gospel will shew *both* accusations to be equally unfounded. So again, if one Opponent object against Revelation that it is mysterious, contrary to Reason, and therefore incredible; and another object that it teaches nothing of importance which may not be discovered without it, and that it is therefore altogether unnecessary;—the Christian will

refute both, by shewing that though it is *mysterious*, it is not contrary to Reason; and that though it is not *contrary* to Reason, it nevertheless teaches things far *above* human Reason, and which are of infinite importance to mankind. In like manner, he will expose the perverseness of *ancient* Unbelievers, whether Jews or Gentiles, in admitting the facts, and yet denying the truths of the Gospel; and the still greater perverseness of *modern* Infidels, in denying both the one and the other. With equal ease he will also vindicate the first preachers of the Gospel, and its Sacred Records, from the absurd and contradictory imputations which are frequently cast upon them; without any inconsistency of argument on his part, or any danger of making concessions injurious to its truth.

Such is the advantage which the Christian Advocate possesses over his Infidel opponent. And the reason is obvious. Falsehood is ever variable, fluctuating, and inconsistent. Truth is simple, uniform, unchangeable. The former oftentimes defeats its own object by multiplying sophistries, which only clash with each other, and cannot be brought to act together in well-concerted and regular order. The latter, in repelling these sophistries, is able to concentrate its force; its ar-

guments all tending to the same point, and strengthening one another by mutual co-operation. Accordingly, we find that whilst the Adversaries of Revealed Religion have continually entangled themselves in inextricable perplexities, its Defenders have been successful in unravelling their fallacies, and in combating arguments of the most opposite kind, without any departure from principle or consistency. In nothing, perhaps, is the strength of their cause more apparent, than in this striking contrast; wherein Infidels appear like two prevaricating witnesses, who, when examined apart, are found to contradict each other, though neither of them speaks the truth; while the plain and honest Christian, by testimony not to be overthrown, refutes both; exemplifying the Wise Man's saying, that "the lip of truth shall be established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment<sup>b</sup>."

Here, then, we have a striking illustration of that remarkable saying of St. Paul, "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God,

<sup>b</sup> Prov. xii. 19.



“should shine unto them<sup>c</sup>.” We can no otherwise account for such perversion of the understanding, but from blindness as well as hardness of heart. Reasoning so contradictory cannot consist with Truth. Equivocation so palpable is as little reconcilable with sincerity of intention. And equally remote from a religious fear of God, is that bold and presumptuous kind of reasoning, which seems to challenge the wisdom of the Almighty, and would bring down His inscrutable and omniscient counsels to the level of human knowledge.

The conclusion resulting from the whole is this:—that from an attentive and dispassionate consideration of the *history* of Infidelity, and of the *reasoning* by which it is supported, it is proved to originate in the worst passions and propensities of mankind, incited by the insidious and malevolent suggestions of that Evil Spirit, who, in the language of Scripture, “goeth about, seeking “whom he may devour.” Pride of intellect and irregular desires dispose men to cast off all restraint. Of these dispositions the Tempter avails himself to suggest thoughts hostile to the Creator, who, of indisputable right, demands from the creature the submission of

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

the understanding as well as of the will and affections. Thus is man instigated to “strive with his Maker,” and to renounce obedience to him ; till, “forsaking the fountain of living waters,” whence alone flow the streams of spiritual knowledge, he begins to hew out to himself “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Then it is that error, under every possible diversity of form, enters into his mind ; and he flies from folly to folly, and from falsehood to falsehood, finding no rest for the sole of his foot. Such appears to be the rise and progress of Unbelief in the human heart ;—and, if so, how large a share of criminality must be chargeable on the character of the resolute and determined Infidel !

But it may be said, that accusations of this kind cannot, without great harshness and injustice, be alleged against the common herd of Unbelievers ; many of whom never give themselves the trouble to inquire into the proofs of Revelation, and are Infidels rather from inconsideration and ignorance, than from any evil intention to disparage the work of God. To the truth of this observation, so far as inconsideration and ignorance *can* be excusable on subjects of such momentous importance, we may readily accede. But for

such as *resist* the evidences of Revelation when they are set before them, and pride themselves on their Unbelief, no such excuse can be admitted. We have hitherto been speaking of those who, affecting to *argue* against Revealed Religion, professedly *despise* its pretensions: and surely opposition and contempt can never be justified, on the plea of not understanding or not considering the subject in dispute. Some, perhaps, may be deceived by the cunning and sophistry of others, and may be led into error, through inability to extricate themselves from the snares which are laid for them. Towards such persons great compassion, no doubt, is due; and we cannot but deplore their case. Far be it from us to suppose that the guilt of "*despising God*" (which is the heaviest accusation that can be brought against a rational creature, because it implies a wilful depravation of the moral and intellectual faculties) may be indiscriminately charged upon *all* who have fallen into Unbelief. Still, however, it is difficult to conceive, that in a Christian country (where the common benefits of a Christian education are almost universally diffused) this can happen to any who have not some culpable predisposition to be led astray. With respect, therefore, to

those who appear to be the deceived rather than the deceivers, we must not too readily consider them as *involuntary* transgressors of the Divine will, when they give heed to the seducing doctrines of evil-minded men. But with the Sophist, by whom the revealed will of God is evil entreated and presumptuously set at nought, and who indefatigably labours to persuade others to do the same, the case is indeed of a far more atrocious nature : and we are warranted by the manifest reason of the thing, as well as by Apostolical authority, in affirming that he who thus despiseth the Gospel, despiseth God himself.

Whilst therefore we sincerely pity those who may be the dupes, rather than the promoters, of this greatest of all evils, let us not be induced by any mistaken notions of liberality of sentiment, to regard the propagation of error and impiety as a venial offence. Let us consider, to what a dreadful height of presumption that man must have attained, who can persuade himself that he is doing right in spreading this mischief ; and how entirely he must have discarded all reverence, all love and fear of his Maker, and all love of his fellow-creatures likewise, before he can himself be brought, or endeavour to bring others, to despise those clear and incontrovertible

tokens of Divine authority with which Revelation has, in all ages of the world, been accompanied.

Well, indeed, would it be for every one who takes upon him to censure the Gospel Dispensation, if he would seriously consider, with what confidence he may produce *hereafter*, at the tribunal of God, those reasonings which he *now* holds out as sufficient to justify him in treating it with contempt. Let him ask himself, what answer he will be prepared to give when brought to the bar of the Almighty, and when the question is put to him *why* he rejected the system of mercy and Redemption offered to him in the Gospel of Christ? Will he then presume to arraign the *expediency*, the *goodness*, or the *justice* of the Divine Dispensations? Will he venture to plead, that, notwithstanding all the proofs of Divine *power* which stamped its heavenly original, its *wisdom* was yet questionable? Will he hazard the assertion, that an offer proposed by God himself was *unnecessary* and *unworthy of acceptance*? Or will he venture to excuse himself, by charging God with not having vouchsafed him *sufficient evidence* to warrant his belief, in a concern of such unspeakable importance? Will any, or all of these pleas avail him, if, after all, the Gospel



be really the work of God? Alas! well would it be for him to consider, (as says a late venerable Writer of our Church,) that “if Christianity be true, it is *tremendously* true<sup>b</sup> :”—and better will it be, “not to have known “the way of righteousness, than after they “have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them<sup>c</sup>.”

It may be, however, that we only waste our time, in pressing such considerations as these, on the avowed and determined Unbeliever. Yet most true it is, that whether he will hear or whether he will forbear, the time is fast approaching when to such questions as these he *must* render an answer, and when upon the answer which he can give will depend his everlasting sentence. From the awful apprehension of that sentence, every one who knows what is the threatened portion of Unbelievers will shrink with horror.

Turning, therefore, from the contemplation of such a fearful scene, be it our care to “hold “fast the profession of our Faith without “waverin<sup>f</sup>g :” to vindicate it against the “perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds<sup>g</sup> ;” and to endeavour, by sound reasoning, by

<sup>d</sup> Jones’s Preface to Leslie’s Short Method, &c.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Peter ii. 21.      <sup>f</sup> Heb. x. 23.      <sup>g</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 5.

persuasion, by exhortation, and reproof, to “convince the gainsayers<sup>h</sup>,” and to prevent others from being ensnared by their devices. Knowing likewise that a dreadful portion awaits the *Hypocrite* as well as the Unbeliever, let us strive to “adorn the doctrine of “God our Saviour in all things<sup>i</sup>,” and to “be “an example of the believers, in word, in “conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, “in purity<sup>k</sup>.” To these our unceasing endeavours to promote the glory of God and the salvation of all men, let us add our continual supplications to the throne of Grace, for the enlargement of our Lord’s kingdom here on earth, and for its final triumph over all its enemies. And while we strenuously “fight the good fight of Faith<sup>l</sup>,” exhorting others likewise to “lay hold on eternal life,” to “flee from the wrath to come<sup>m</sup>,” and to consider well “how they shall escape, if they “neglect so great Salvation<sup>n</sup>,” as that which is purchased for them by the blood of Christ; let us, in the true spirit of Christian Charity, beseech God, to “have mercy on all Jews, “Turks, Infidels, and Heretics; to take from “them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and

<sup>h</sup> Titus i. 9.

<sup>i</sup> Titus ii. 10.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 12.

<sup>l</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 12.

<sup>m</sup> Matt. iii. 7.

<sup>n</sup> Heb. ii. 3.

“ contempt of his word, and so to fetch them  
“ home to his flock, that they may be saved  
“ among the remnant of the true Israelites,  
“ and be made one fold under one Shepherd,  
“ Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and  
“ reigneth with the Father and the Holy Spi-  
“ rit, one God, world without end.” Amen.

# APPENDIX

TO

## VOLUME II.

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### SERMON XIII.

P. 3. l. 18. *There is nothing which can be interpreted as obliging us to step beyond the line of plain and simple reasoning, &c.]* “The defender of Christianity,” says Bp. Hurd, “is not concerned to obviate every idle fancy that floats in the head of a visionary objector. Men have not the making of their Religion; but must take it for such as the Scripture represents it to be. And if we defend it on the footing of such representation, we do all that can be reasonably required of us. It is nothing to the purpose, what men may imagine to themselves concerning the marks and characters of a Divine Revelation: it is enough that there are *such marks and characters* in the Religion of Jesus, (whether more or fewer, whether the same or other, than we might previously have expected, is of no moment) as shew it, in all reasonable construction, to be *divine*. And thus our labour with Inquirers is much abridged, while all foreign and impertinent questions are rejected and laid aside.” Bp. Hurd’s Sermons, vol. 1. Sermon 2. p. 35. Again; “all that unbelievers have a right to ask, is on what grounds we affirm the truth and divinity of our Religion: and the sole duty which the text imposes upon us, is to satisfy that question. Their curiosity and our labour should not, at least needs not, be extended beyond those bounds.” Ibid. vol. 3. Sermon 3. p. 51.

P. 5. l. 25. *It has indeed been suggested, that St. Peter might here intend to reprove a contentious spirit on the part of the Adversary, rather than the Apologist of the Gospel.]* See a discourse on this text, preached before the University of Oxford, by Dr. Thomas Patten. 8vo. 1755. p. 4.

P. 16. l. 18. *When our Lord said to the Jews, “Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right,” he made no appeal from Divine to human wisdom, &c.]* It is true, that our Lord here appeals, in some way, to the good sense of the

Jews, and both here and elsewhere, *reasons* with them on the evidences of his mission. But he appeals to them as persons *taught of God*, and already instructed in Divine truths by *Revelation*; and he argues with them *as believers in the Scriptures*, not as *philosophers* who knew nothing of Religion but by *the light of Nature*. The Jews were qualified, in an especial manner, to judge of his pretensions, and on that ground our Lord's arguments were pressed upon them.

P. 17. l. 23. *We see nothing like a recommendation to examine his doctrine first, &c.*] I cannot consider it (as some respectable Divines have done) to be matter of indifference, whether the *internal* or *external* evidence of Christianity should take the lead in our inquiries; that is, whether we are to try the *doctrine* by the weight of *testimony*, or the *testimony* by the abstract credibility of the *doctrine*. In the former case, we rely on the wisdom of God, for our security against error; in the latter, we seem to take *human* wisdom as the ground of our conviction.

P. 19. l. 3. *The Fathers of the Christian Church.*] Gregory Nazianzen, in reply to the sarcasms of Julian on the credulity of Christians, thus explains the nature of that *Faith* which they inculcated. “Βούλεται γὰρ ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος [sc. πίστευσον] μὴ ἐξεῖναι διαπιστεῖν τοῖς ὑπὸ τῶν θεοφόρων ἀνδρῶν εἰρημένοις, ἀλλ’ ἀπόδειξιν εἶναι τοῦ λόγου, τὸ ἐκείνων ἀξιόπιστον, πάσης δυνάμεως λογικῆς καὶ ἀντιλογικῆς ἰσχυρότερον. Hoc enim sermone, (sc. *crede*,) id intelligimus, non licere iis quæ ab hominibus divino numine afflatis dicta sunt fidem abrogare, verum pro sermonis et doctrinæ confirmatione *illorum auctoritatem* esse, omni logicâ facultate atque contradictione validiorem.” Orat. 3. tom. 1. p. 97. edit. Paris. 1630. For a brief statement of the arguments used by Justin Martyr, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, Arnobius, Lactantius, Ignatius, Athanasius, and Eusebius, see the learned work of Scultetus, entitled, *Medullæ Theologiæ Patrum Syntagma*, 4to. Francfort. 1634. p. 9. 29. 115. 130. 302. 324. 355. 498. 768. 774. 781. 783. 821.

Ibid. l. 18. *We have occasion, perhaps, to regret that these venerable and truly learned Advocates for the Gospel ever departed from the plainer and more direct mode of proof, &c.*] “The apologies of all times,” says Bp. Hurd, “have been too generally constructed on false and pernicious principles; on such as cannot support, but rather tend to weaken and disgrace the very cause they would defend. Such were the apologies, many times, of the *antient Christians*, who would incorporate with the divine religion of Jesus the vain doctrines of the Gentile philo-



sophy : and such have been too often the more *modern apologies*, which debase the word of God, and corrupt it, with the dreams of our presumptuous metaphysics. Our Religion has suffered much in both these ways : not that reason or philosophy of any kind, truly so called, can disserve the cause of a *divine* Religion ; but that we reason and philosophize *falsely* or *perversely* ; that is, we apply falsehood to truth ; or we misapply truth itself, in subjecting the incomprehensible mysteries of our faith to the scrutiny and minute discussion of our best reason." Vol. I. Sermon. 2. p. 31, 32.

P. 19. l. 26. *In these latter times the proofs of Christianity from its external evidence are of necessity rendered more complex.*] " To the primitive Christians, such as those to whom the exhortation of the text is addressed, it was evidence sufficient, that they had the great facts of the Gospel, especially that decisive fact, the resurrection of Christ, reported to them by persons who had been eye-witnesses of those extraordinary transactions, or who had heard them, at least, from eye-witnesses, and were endowed, besides, with the power of working miracles in confirmation of their testimony. For in those days, it is to be observed, they, who were commissioned to plant the Gospel in the world, *went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* This state of things continued through what is called the apostolic age, and perhaps longer, during which time it was easy for the plainest Christian to give such an *answer* to those who required a reason of *the hope that was in him*, as was perfectly satisfactory. But when the Gospels were admitted by the faithful, as authentic accounts of their Master's history and doctrine, and when the Apostles had further drawn out and explained the principles and proofs of Christianity in their several writings, that is, when the canon of the New Testament was completed, and generally received as such, (all which was done within the first century from the Christian æra,) then the appeal lay to these Scriptures, and the ground of a Christian's persuasion was, the authority of the inspired writers. And now, if believers were asked the reason of *the hope that was in them*, the answer was, that so it was written in books, which were in all hands, and allowed by all to contain nothing but infallible truth. Nor could the force of this answer be disputed, when the memory of certain facts was recent, when the places where, and the persons to whom, or for whose use the sacred books were written, could be pointed out, and when the writers of

them were known, by the miracles wrought by them, to have been under the direction of the Holy Ghost. On the conviction, which this apology carried with it, the world became Christian. But in process of time, and after a course of many ages, it might be doubted whether those books had been transmitted pure and uncorrupted. And under these circumstances, the *answer*, being somewhat enlarged, stands thus: That the hope of a Christian is founded on the authority of the sacred Canon, composed by inspired men, as was universally allowed in the first ages of Christianity, and not materially altered, as we have reason to believe, to this day. The answer given in these three periods is, you see, very general, because the question is, on what grounds of reason a plain man could justify his profession of Christianity: and the answer, in each case, is a proper one, and of real weight. But the answer of knowing and skilful men is more particular, may indeed be infinitely varied and extended, according to the abilities of the answerer; and, from such minute and laboured apologies much additional light and conviction hath been derived." Bp. Hurd's Sermons, Vol. 3. Sermon 3. p. 48—51.

P. 24. l. 6. *as only of collateral or secondary, not of direct and primary importance.*] Bp. Hurd thus expresses himself, on this part of the subject. "What if inquisitive men should go farther, and when they have set forth the evidences of Christianity to their own satisfaction, and that of others, should proceed to give us a *rationale* of it's doctrines: would not their pains be useful, as tending very much to promote the honour of our divine religion?—Perhaps they might, if *soberly* employed, and if inquirers would set out with a resolution of stopping in their curious researches, when they had no ideas, or no clear and distinct ones. But, even with this restriction, *two* things are further to be observed. *ONE* is, that no Christian is bound to make this solicitous inquiry into the doctrinal, no, nor into the moral part of the Gospel. It is enough that his faith and life be regulated by it's doctrines and precepts, whether he do, or do not, see the grounds in reason, on which they stand. Nay, possibly his conduct is then most acceptable, when he looks no farther than to the authority of the Gospel; agreeably to that well-known decision of our Lord himself, *blessed is he who hath not seen, and yet hath believed*: not that he expects any man to believe or to obey him, without reason: but he most approves the ingenuous turn of that man's mind, who admits his divine mission, on a sufficient, indeed, but not

the highest, degree of evidence ; and much more, therefore, who yields obedience to his laws, acknowledged on such evidence to be divine, without inquiring further into the reasons of them. Indeed, to what purpose do I scrupulously ask a reason of that, which I already know to be just and fit, because reasonably admitted to proceed from divine authority?—The OTHER observation I would make, is, that if, after the most diligent inquiry, we should not yet be able to penetrate the reasons of many things, or to give ourselves entire satisfaction about them, this unacceptable experience should not in the least affect our belief and esteem of the Gospel. For all that follows from such disappointed curiosity is only this, That we are weak and blind ; and not that the things themselves are either false or unreasonable. Our duty, therefore, is to confide in the *revealed word* ; not questioning it's authority, or torturing it's language ; but accepting with thankfulness, what we do understand, and with reverence, what we do not. When these two conditions are inviolably observed, the way of minute inquiry into the doctrines of Christianity, so far forth as they are objects of inquiry at all, may be usefully and commendably employed." Vol. 3. Sermon 3. p. 51, 54, 56.

#### SERMON XIV.

P. 32. 1. 2. *it is of importance, in the first place, to know what has ever yet been done by him, without help from Revelation.*] “ There is a great difference between being able originally, and by ourselves alone, to investigate and discover the great truths of Natural Religion, and the discerning and assenting to them, when discovered. Reason therefore is sufficient in one sense, and insufficient in another. Left to itself in this it's weak and depraved condition, Reason alone hath not been able to recover men from Superstition and Idolatry, nor to produce one uniform and perfect scheme of Morality : nor in any parts of the heathen world do we find it sufficient unto this day. But assisted and instructed by those who know the Truth, Reason is capable of apprehending it, and as fast as it discerneth it, it assenteth unto it. That the Light of Nature, then, is sufficient with proper helps, we do readily allow. Abstractedly considered, both the Light and the Law of Nature are perfect : the imperfection which appeareth in both is owing to the imperfection and depravity of man. The Light of Nature is capable of continual improvement or diminution, and if it be impaired by Sin, and overclouded with error, still as long as God affordeth means

of instruction, if any refuse the assistance that is offered, the goodness of God is absolved, and the fault lieth wholly upon themselves." Felton's *Lady Moyer's Lect.* pref. p. lxxv.

P. 32. l. 15. *what we usually call a state of Nature, is more properly a state of traditional knowledge.*] That this was the opinion of the most eminent Heathen Philosophers, is clearly shewn in Ellis's *Knowledge of Divine things from Revelation, not from Reason or Nature.* Dublin. 2nd edit. 8vo. 1771. p. 237 et seq.

P. 35. l. 17. *according to the confessions of the greatest Philosophers.*] See Dr. Clarke's *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, proposition 7. Smith's *Appeal for the Christian Religion*, fol. 1675. b. 2. ch. 2. Also Ellis, as above, p. 19, 32, 65, 66, 237, 238.

P. 36. l. 21. *whom they nevertheless sometimes extol in terms of extravagant panegyric.*] "It is fashionable with these men, to extol the perfection and excellency of the *Heathen Theology and Morality*: and well they may, for the *Heathen* plan is, in many respects, more *excellent* than *their's*. The *Heathen*, that is, the more excellent of them, who began to be awakened from their slumber, and to be sensible of the weakness and misery of *Human Nature*, perceived, upon just reflection, the *original* excellence of the *Soul*: they saw the wound, and searched, though in vain, for the *cure*. They proceeded upon what they knew, with a desire to know more: whereas *our Heathen* stop short, and do either *fear* or *refuse* to carry their inquiries into another world." Felton's *L. M. Lect.* p. 122.

P. 38. l. 12. *That great improvements have since been made, in framing systems of Ethics, of Metaphysics, and of what is called Natural Theology, &c.*] "As to the many admirable Treatises, wrote to demonstrate the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, with the great duties of religion thence to be inferred, according to the different relations we stand in to God, our neighbour, or ourselves; they are worthy of all possible reverence and esteem, have been managed with the utmost strength of judgment and perspicuity of reason, strong and conclusive arguments, in a method strict and demonstrative, beyond what other ages have produced. They are the honour of the present, and will serve for the instruction and imitation of future times. But notwithstanding this, I can dare to affirm, that these inquiries were carried on, these principles so firmly established, these consequences so incontestably demonstrated, not by the strength of Reason or the Light of Nature; but by an assistance far superior, the light and



evidence of Revelation. It was under the direction of that unerring and eternal Truth, that clear and more infallible knowledge than geometrical or metaphysical demonstration, that the exalted Reason of these excellent persons hath carried their labours so far in the service of Religion. And if they had not had the Gospel in their hands, they would have wrote as loosely and incorrectly as the Philosophers before them. Let *them* have honour, but the glory of it be ascribed only to God." Ellis, as above, p. 15.

P. 39. l. 15. *St. Paul says, that through Faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, &c.*]  
 "The Spirit of God says expressly, that *through Faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God*, Heb. xi. 3. *ῥήματι Θεοῦ*, not the *Λόγος*, but, what it generally signifies, the Will, Decree, Order, and Command of God, without any counsel or assistance, without any help or materials prepared, but only, let it be so, and it was so. The words want no comment, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*, (ver. 1.) an assent to a thing as credible, upon the testimony of God, whose relation is infallible; Reason therefore could never so much as have known that the worlds were created, had not God communicated it. And there cannot be a greater absurdity than to say, Man can find out God by the works of Creation, yet cannot find out that Creation is the work of God. Which was exactly the case of the old Heathens, who never could determine who formed the world, nor when, nor how, nor out of what it was made. But God revealed it, as a truth necessary to his rational creatures. By this we understand, and are fully persuaded of it's truth. And as Faith is the evidence of things not seen, that is the only knowledge we have of God, whom no man hath seen: or, in other words, he could not have been known, unless he had manifested himself. This is the demonstration of the First Cause, and Origin of things, which Pagan Philosophy so earnestly longed for, but never attained. St. Peter, 2nd Epistle, iii. 5. declares the same, *that by the word of God, the Heavens were of old*. But an omnipotent *Fiat*, a creative word, a speaking things into being, is above the reach of created minds, what Reason cannot possibly unfold; nor to be inferred from any ordinary manifestation of Divine workings and power, in causes or effects: but is altogether extraordinary, supernatural, mysterious, and a hidden act of Volition and Omnipotence, i. e. of the very Essence: what therefore no created Intellect could discover, what it never did; there being no Philosopher who did not hold an eternal first Matter." Ellis, as above, p. 359, 360.



P. 41. l. 4. *But even from these passages, strong as they appear to be, it will be difficult to draw an argument in favour of the notion that man may arrive at the knowledge of God, without the light of Revelation.*] See Ellis, as above, p. 266 to p. 202. and Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 52 to p. 66.

P. 43. l. 19. *It is indeed hardly possible to suppose, that these truths were not revealed to man from the very beginning.*] "If we suppose no original Revelation, we must also suppose the *Knowledge* of the True God never to have obtained among men, till it pleased him to *reveal* Himself, and no further than he so revealed himself. For, look into all ages and nations, the fact is evident, as far as history can inform us; wherever we find a true Religion, we find at the same time a *Revelation*: and false Religions have still prevailed, from the loss or neglect of the *original* or *subsequent* Revelations." Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 59.

P. 46. l. 9. *Philosophers enjoyed opportunities, by their travels into Eastern countries, &c.*] Thales, the founder of the Ionic Philosophy, travelled to Phœnicia and Egypt; Pythagoras, who instituted the Italic Philosophy, to Tyre and Sidon, Syria, Egypt, Babylon, Arabia, India, &c.; Plato, to Egypt, &c.; Democritus, to Egypt, Persia, Chaldaea, and India. See Stanley's Hist. of Philosophy, 4to. 4th edit. p. 3, 165, 396, 397, 398, 516. Also Gale's Court of the Gentiles, b. I. ch. 2. and Gale's Philosoph. Generalis, 12mo. 1676, p. 158, 165, 190. Bruckeri Inst. Hist. Philos. per. l. part. 2. l. 2. c. 6. §. 1.

P. 47. l. 20. *for God had shewed it unto them, that is, he had originally taught it them by Revelation.*] "Because that which may be known of God, as much as was necessary and sufficient for their present circumstances, concerning his Essence, Attributes, or Will, *is manifest in them*, or (as the margin and others read it) to them, or among them, not indeed from Nature and Reason, *for God hath shewed it unto them*; ἐφανερώσε, the word expressly denotes a positive act of God, who brought to light, made manifest and evident, that which was dark, obscure, or unknown before, by the sundry ways He thought proper to reveal and make Himself known to us." Ellis, as above, p. 270. Dr. Felton also remarks, (in his L. M. Lect. p. 61.) that this passage of Scripture "plainly supposes the *revealed* to have been the *original* knowledge men had of the CREATOR." An eminent biblical scholar has, however, suggested to me, that *shewed*, in the sense here taken of *made known by Revelation*, "is by no means the necessary meaning of ἐφανερώσε, and that the appeal being immediately made to the works of creation, τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα, &c. seems to indicate that the evidence shining in them is the thing

intended." Should this be admitted, (though I cannot but think that ἐν αὐτοῖς refers rather to the Heathen themselves, than to the τὰ ἀόρατα, the invisible things of God,) the meaning of the passage may still be, that the works of creation bear such *testimony* to the Being and Attributes of God, as to make men inexcusable in *rejecting* the belief of them, *when they are revealed*, without implying that they are sufficient *in themselves* to lead to the *discovery* of such truths.

P. 49. l. 7. *But without entering into refined or doubtful criticisms on the text itself, &c.*] A full comment on this remarkable text, Rom. ii. 14, 15, may be found in Ellis's work, as above, p. 62, with some additional observations in p. 302. See also Parkhurst's Gr. Lex. on the word φύσις. Whitby, *in locum*: and Mr. Willats's Sermon on this text, 8vo. 1744, reprinted in "the Scholar Armed," vol. I. p. 197. To those, however, who are not satisfied with Mr. Willats's interpretation, (which, perhaps, is not altogether convincing) the text may be fully vindicated against the Deists and Advocates of Natural Religion, without departing from its more plain and obvious construction.

Ibid. l. 18. *The precepts of Noah.*] See Ellis, p. 236 and 303. Heidegger. Hist. Patriarch. Exercit. 2. §. 8.

P. 51. l. 21. *The first question therefore, is, what are the inlets of knowledge?*] See Ellis, ch. 2. throughout, and Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 39—47.

Ibid. l. 27. *But all these seem deducible to the two general heads of Sense and Inspiration.*] "Knowledge," says Lord Bacon, "*is like waters: some waters descend from the Heavens, some spring from the earth.*" So the primary *partition* of Sciences is to be derived from their fountains: some are seated above; some are here beneath. For, all knowledge proceeds from a twofold information; *either from Divine Inspiration, or from external Sense.* As for that knowledge which is infused by Instruction, *that is cumulative, not original; as it is in waters, which, besides the head-springs, are increased by the reception of the rivers that fall into them. Wherefore we will divide Sciences into Theology and Philosophy.*" Advancement of Learning, b. 3. ch. i. p. 63.

P. 52. l. 18. *Satisfactorily to demonstrate the Divine Nature and Attributes, or even the existence of God, by arguments à priori, appears to be beyond the reach of man.*] "An argument *à priori*," says Dr. Gretton, "is an argument from something antecedent to something consequent; from principle to corollary; from cause to effect: in which case, whatever is in the premises should not only be well known,

but *prior*, in order of nature and conception, to the consequences to be drawn from them, and with a stronger light and evidence; as the stability of every superstructure must rest upon the greater firmness and solidity of the foundation. If there be any thing which can justly be considered as *prior*, in order of nature or conception, to the First Cause of all things; then may the argument from such prior thing or principle be good and valid, and in the first place, and chiefly to be insisted on. But if there is in reality nothing prior to the Being and Attributes of God, considered as the First Cause and Causality, nothing in Nature, nothing in Reason; then had we better let such fruitless attempts alone, and return to the good old way; nor pretend, improperly, or rashly, to search into the *grounds* or *reasons* of the First Cause, of whom we neither antecedently do, or can, know any thing: but, pertinently and religiously, from his wonderful works and most gracious mercies to us, conclude both what He is, and under what views He chooses to be represented to, and by us." *Review of the argument à priori, in relation to the Being and Attributes of God, in Reply to Dr. Clarke*, 8vo. 1726. p. 6, 8. It is a remarkable circumstance, that Dr. Clarke, in his zeal to magnify the argument *à priori*, advances many reasons to shew that the perfections of the Deity are not demonstrable *à posteriori*, inasmuch as *finite* phenomena cannot prove an *infinite* Being, &c. Thus he labours to invalidate *one* mode of proof, hitherto deemed the most incontrovertible; while Dr. Gretton, certainly with better success, endeavours to shew that the *other* mode, which Dr. C. would establish, is inadequate to the purpose. May not the advocate for Revealed Religion fairly take occasion from hence, to maintain the insufficiency of *both*, to demonstrate this great primary truth, which is only to be decisively proved from *Revelation*? With respect to the argument *à priori*, Dr. Waterland also has fully proved its insufficiency to demonstrate the Divine Existence and Attributes, in an excellent Dissertation on the subject, subjoined to Mr. Edmund Law's *Enquiry into the Ideas of Space, Time, &c.* 8vo. 1734.

P. 53. l. 7. *Between matter and spirit, &c. the connection is not perceptible to human observation.*] See Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 78—90. Ellis, p. 91—102.

Ibid. l. 17. *As soon, indeed, as the Creator is shewn to us, &c. our understandings readily admit the idea of such a Being.*] "Tell men there is a God, and their mind embraces it as a necessary truth; unfold his attributes, and they will see the explanation of them in his works.



When the foundation is laid sure and firm, that there is a God, and His Will the Cause of all things, nothing made but by His special appointment and command; then the order of beings will fill their minds with a due sense of the Divine Majesty, and they may be made a scale to raise juster conceptions of what is immortal and invisible. Every thing around us, or that hath any relation to us, will be helps to the better discernment of things not seen." Ellis, p. 377.

P. 56. l. 15. *That even a knowledge of the Being and Attributes of God must have been originally derived from Revelation.*] The arguments in proof of this may be seen more fully drawn out in Dr. Campbell's *Necessity of Revelation*, Sect. 5, 6, 7, and in Ellis's work above quoted, from p. 352 to p. 404, and throughout the whole of the 6th chapter.

P. 57. l. ult. *The attempt to frame systems of Moral Duty, &c.*] See Ellis, as above, p. 404—443; also Felton's L. M. Lect. preface, p. xxvi.—li.

P. 59. l. 6. *The Immortality of the Soul.*] The impossibility of arriving at any certainty respecting the Immateriality and Immortality of the Soul, without the light of Revelation, is largely discussed in Ellis's Work, p. 381—395; and also in Dr. Campbell's *Necessity of Revelation*, Sect. 3, 4.

P. 63. l. 2. *The doctrine of innate ideas.*] This subject also is very copiously and ably treated by Ellis, p. 59—80. In the second edition of this work (from which the above quotations are cited) is inserted a valuable chapter (from p. 133 to p. 184.) "intituled, "*Considerations on Mr. Locke's Hypothesis, that the Knowledge of God is attainable by ideas of Reflection; wherein is demonstrated, on his own principles, that such Knowledge is not to be so attained.*" This chapter appears to have been first published as a separate pamphlet, and afterwards introduced into the second edition of this work.

P. 66. l. 5. *The origin of language.*] Here again, see Ellis, p. 104—112, who discusses this point with his accustomed perspicuity and force. See also Parkhurst, in the preface to his Hebrew Lexicon, p. 4, and in his note on the word קרא, p. 734, 2d edit. 4to. with the authorities of Leland, Eusebius, Walton, Johnson, &c. therein quoted. Some strong arguments to prove that language must have been of Divine original, are also urged by Bishop Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, b. 4. sect. 4. vol. iii. p. 95. 3d edit. 1758\*.

\* I have made very frequent reference to Dr. Ellis's elaborate work in the notes on this Lecture, from a desire to direct the reader's attention, in an

## SERMON XV.

P. 69. l. 10. *It will not be found to depreciate any just pretensions of the human understanding.*] Nor is this any degradation of Man, that he was not placed at the head of Intellectual Beings, able, perhaps, to contemplate spiritual truths with a kind of intuition. Yet was he created perfect in his order, and endued with all the faculties suitable to his condition; as a mortal creature, placed among things which are seen and temporal; as intended for immortality, instructed in things not seen and eternal, in order to fix his hopes on that blessed reward of being admitted into the city of God, to see clearly, and enjoy fully, the glories of the heavenly kingdom, which is reserved for his final and eternal state. The ideas of Sense, or the operations of Reason, were insufficient to teach him the Author or End of his Being, or the objects of Divine Wisdom. A full view of them was not necessary: therefore God exhibited them in such degrees, as would best answer the designs of his Providence, and all the purposes and ends of man." Ellis's Knowledge of Divine Things, p. 96.

P. 70. l. 12. *Reason, the eye of the mind.*] "The Mind knows intellectual things, as the Eye does visible ones, by the interposition of a proper Agent and due Light. What therefore the *Sun* is in visible things, though neither the Sight, nor Eye, yet the cause of the Eye's seeing, the discernment of sensible things, and of himself being visible, so is God in intellectuals, neither the human mind, nor reason, nor understanding, yet is the immediate sole cause of all spiritual knowledge to Man; that ineffable Light, which only can open his mind to contemplate the invisible glories of the Divine Nature." Ellis, p. 376. "Reason" (says the great Master in the art of reasoning, Bishop Jeremy Taylor) "is the eye of the soul, in all things, natural, moral, or religious; and Faith is the light of that eye, in

especial manner, to so valuable a performance. It is now become scarce; and it is much to be wished, that it were reprinted, and put into the hands of theological students, who would find it an admirable preservative against many prevailing errors of the present day. An Abridgment of it was published, as a Pamphlet, by the same Author, and entitled, "An Enquiry whence cometh Wisdom and Understanding to Man;" which has been reprinted in "The Scholar Armed," and is an excellent Tract. But the larger work deserves to be thoroughly studied. It is to be lamented that the design was never completed. Together with this Work, the first four of Dr. Felton's Lady Moyer's Lectures, with the Preface to them, (which I have only perused since the publication of my first edition,) are admirable, as laying the foundations of just reasoning on theological subjects, and will be found a most useful elementary treatise in the study of Divinity.



things pertaining to God: for, natural reason cannot teach us the things of God, i. e. reason instructed only by the World, which St. Paul calls the natural man, cannot discern the things of the Spirit, for they are spiritually discerned, i. e. they are taught and perceived by the aids of God's Spirit, by Revelation, and Divine assistance and Grace: but though *natural reason* cannot, it is false to say, that *reason* cannot: for, *reason illuminated* can perceive the things of God; i. e. when reason is taught in that faculty, under that Master, and by those rules which are proper for spiritual things, then reason can do all its intentions." Bishop Taylor's *Ductor Dubit.* b. 1. ch. 2. r. 3. n. 56. p. 58.

P. 73. l. 9. *But to infer from hence, that human Reason is to be the measure and standard of Divine Truth, &c.*] "To be the adequate measure of all Truth, so as to have no one Truth above the comprehension of it, is as much as can be said of the Reason and understanding of God himself.—But to say the same of the Reason of a Man, or of the intelligence of the most illuminated Angel, would be to confound all distinction between finite and infinite, God and creature, and to advance the most absurd, and withal the most impious and blasphemous proposition imaginable. And yet this is the general principle upon which the body of *Socinianism* turns, [the Author might have added, of *Infidelity* also,] and by which it would be most directly and compendiously confuted." Norris on Reason and Faith, 8vo. 1697. introd. §. 8. p. 13. See also the whole of chap. 4. in which it is proved, by most incontrovertible arguments, "*that human Reason is not the measure of Truth.*"

P. 74. l. 15. *They affirm of human Reason in particular, what is only true of Reason in general, or of Reason in the abstract.*] "Whatever is agreeable to right Reason is most certainly true: but this amounts to no more than saying, that *all Truth is true*. There are doubtless many Beings superior to us, who are able to discover more Truths than we can do; and God himself has a most perfect and universal perception and comprehension of all possible Truths. But yet his all-perfect knowledge can be no guide to us any further than he is pleased to reveal himself to us.—*Reason in general*, if a Guide, is no guide to us; nor can we, from the perfection of *Reason in general*, infer the perfection of *our own*, or the uselessness or non-necessity of Revelation." Dr. T. Randolph's Sermon on 2 Cor. iii. 5. entitled, "an Enquiry into the Sufficiency of Reason in Matters of Religion." See his Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 27. See also Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. 4. §. 5, 6.

P. 76. l. 27. *It has been justly observed, &c.*] Speaking of the ancient worshippers of fire, Mr. Jones says, “With these unenlightened idolaters, wise enough as naturalists, but miserably blind and ignorant of things spiritual, *God* and the *world* were but one and the same thing; and this persuasion gave birth to the whole science of *astrology*, for which the Chaldeans were so much famed; so that if we desire to obtain their judgment on *nature*, we are under a necessity of taking their *theological* doctrines along with it.” Essay on the First Principles of Natural Philosophy, b. 4. ch. 3. See his Works, vol. viii. p. 315.

P. 77. l. 11. *That the ancients had clear and just conceptions of some fundamental truths in physics, &c.*] See Mr. Jones’s, Essay, as above, b. 4. ch. 1. p. 281—294, containing some general observations on the Learning of the Ancients.

Ibid. l. 25. *Regarding the powers of Nature as the Gods of Nature.*] “The philosophers of the Heathen world,” says Mr. Jones, “were well acquainted with the influence of these elements [*viz. air and fire*] over all other things: and being ignorant of the true and living God, judged it to be impossible that air and fire could perform such wonders, unless they were divine; and therefore worshipped them universally, as immortal and intelligent. This is the error which *Plato*, having by some means obtained a better light, so clearly condemns, in that memorable passage where he speaks of physical causes. But it was an error so deeply rooted, that this sublime philosopher himself was not altogether free from it.” Again; “These elements they worshipped, not according to *Plato*’s excellent distinction, as *secondary instruments* in the hands of God, but as the primary causes of all things, and the supreme governors of the world; denying and rejecting the supremacy of that God of the Hebrews, who created the world in the beginning, does now sustain the powers of nature, and will at last overthrow what they vainly believed to be immutable and eternal.” See his Essay as above, b. 4. ch. ii. p. 309—312.

P. 78. l. 11. *Their imaginary doctrine of the Anima Mundi.*] “In eam haud pauci ingrediuntur sententiam, omnem motum et, quicumque hinc pendent corporum naturalium effectus, à *spiritu* quodam *naturæ* provenire, qui in omnibus et singulis corporibus illud ipsum sit quod vulgò *formam* appellant. Et sanè antiquissima est hæc sententia, si placita et decreta philosophorum excutiamus; illis quoque tribuenda, qui totum hocce universum ex animâ et corpore, seu spiritu et materiâ, constare arbitrabantur, illudque adeò instar animalis cujusdam concepiebant. Non

omnes tamen, quod probè observandum, et hîc eâdem ratione sentiunt, aut eodem modo loquuntur. Nonnulli ex veteribus, ut Stoici, ipsum Deum pro animâ mundi venditabant, Deum cum naturâ confundentes, nec alieni adeò ab illâ impietate, quam Benedictus Spinoza iterum in lucem produxit. Alii autem, ut Platonici, substantiam quandam à Deo distinctam fungi hoc officio contendebant.” Buddei Elem. Philos. part 3. cap. 6. §. 11, 12. et seq. Buddei elsewhere remarks on the opinion of Plato, (that human souls derive their origin from the *anima mundi*, and revert to it,) “Sed, cùm mundi animam inter *ὑποστάσεις* divinas referant, iisdem difficultatibus premuntur. Si enim *materialis* sit anima mundi, *ὑπόστασις* quædam *divina materialis* admittenda erit. Sin *immaterialis*, quo pacto dividi atque in partes discerpi potest?” De Atheismo et Superstitione, cap. 7. §. 2 p. 573. See also Bruckeri Inst. Hist. Philos. per. 1. part 2. l. 2. c. 6. sect. 1. §. 16.

P. 79. l. 12. *That Aristotle wandered still farther from the truth.*] See Brucker, as above, per. 1. part 2. l. 2. c. 7. sect. 1. Also Campbell's Necessity of Revelation, sect. 6. p. 274—281.

P. 81. l. 25. *To argue, therefore, (as too many are inclined to do,) from modern discoveries in Chemistry, Pneumatics, Electricity, or the like, that human knowledge in general is not only progressive but unlimited, is unwarrantable and presumptuous.*] This is a favourite kind of argument in the present day, and probably gains over to the cause of Infidelity many persons of weak judgment and superficial knowledge. It is, indeed, often urged with a parade of profound philosophical discussion, well calculated to mislead and perplex an uninformed mind. Striking instances of this occur in Mr. Godwin's reasoning to prove *the perfectibility of the human mind*, and in M. Condorcet's elaborate piece of sophistry, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*.

P. 86. l. 19. *To these questions no proper answer can be given, but that it is the Will of God.*] This is acknowledged by Dr. Paley (in his Moral Philosophy, b. 2. ch. 1, 2, 3.) and, I believe, by all *Christian* Writers on the subject of Ethics. But the fundamental error in Dr. Paley's system appears to me to be this: that he *presumes* the *insufficiency* of the Holy Scriptures, as a rule of conduct, in order to introduce his principle of general expediency, or utility, and then, in effect, makes the latter the *leading* principle of his system, notwithstanding his previous acknowledgment that the *express* declarations of God's Will,

when they are to be had, must take place of all other rules. Now, St. Paul says expressly, that "all Scripture was given by inspiration of God, that the man of God" (that is, the believer in God's word) "may be PERFECT, *thoroughly furnished unto ALL good works.*" Does not this imply the absolute sufficiency and perfection of the Scriptures, as a rule of life? And if so, can it be necessary to call in any other principle of conduct, as a *succedaneum* to the Scriptures? This seems to deserve the serious consideration of all those admirers of Dr. Paley's work, who are *believers in Holy Writ*: for Dr. P.'s system is professedly a system of *Christian* morality, not a mere *philosophical* treatise. To those who acknowledge the authority of Revelation, nothing more seems necessary, as a rule of moral conduct, than a well-digested system of *Scripture Ethics*, in which the several duties of life should be enforced by arguments drawn from the Sacred Writings, carefully compared and methodized, and grounded *exclusively* on the principle of *obedience to the Divine commands*. A work of this kind appears to be still a desideratum, although there are many useful treatises extant which might serve as helps to the completion of it. Such a work would supersede, by its intrinsic weight of *authority*, all systems founded on merely *human* reasoning. Moral Philosophy would then fall into its proper rank, as the mere *attendant* on Revealed Religion; and would be chiefly occupied in the study of *Caswistry*, teaching men how to *apply* the precepts of Scripture to the practical concerns of life. Yet, though confined to this object, it would still be a noble and important science, subservient to one of the great ends of Revealed Religion, that of shewing men what is good, and instructing them how to perform it. If it were, moreover, occasionally employed in illustrating the admirable conformity of the Revealed Will of God to the best notions we can form of general Expediency, Utility, Fitness, and the like; great encouragement and satisfaction, no doubt, might be derived, from arguments so well adapted to strengthen our faith, and to animate our exertions. But *these* do not appear to be *necessary* for our conviction. The *foundation of Moral Truth* is the *Will of God*. The proper *motive to Moral Conduct*, is the *Fear of God*. The perfection of *Moral Instruction*, is the *Word of God*. Let human Philosophy be content to serve as the handmaid to Divine Wisdom, and it will need no higher pretensions, to give it dignity, and to command respect.

P. 87. l. 16. *They will contend, that this is admitting a very*



*degrading principle of conduct.*] This is a favourite argument with Lord Shaftesbury, and has been adopted by many of our Deistical writers.

P. 90. l. 16. *That there is an antecedent, eternal, and immutable fitness of things.*] See Clarke, Cudworth, Cumberland, Wilkins, Wollaston, &c. But how far any ideas that can be formed of the fitness of things, or of the relations which they bear to each other, may properly be said to be *antecedent, eternal, or immutable*, may be judged of by the following observations of a very profound and luminous reasoner:—"Unless the ideas, whose relations constitute those truths which are necessary and eternal, be the *Divine* ideas, it will be impossible that necessary and eternal truths should be what we suppose they are, that is, necessary and eternal. For, necessary and eternal truths must be necessary and eternal relations, and it being impossible that relations should be more necessary or eternal than the subjects from which they result, unless these ideas, the subjects of these relations, be necessary and eternal, how can their relations be so? 'Tis plain, therefore, that these ideas must be necessary and eternal. But now, I pray, what ideas are so but the *Divine*? What is there in the whole compass of Being that is necessary, eternal, and immutable, but God and his *Divine* perfections?" Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. iv. p. 151.

P. 91. l. 9. *Who made, or ordained it, but God himself? How, then, can it be regarded as antecedent to his Will?*] The same arguments which have been brought by eminent Writers, to shew the fallacy of attempting to prove the existence of a Deity by reasoning *à priori*, may serve also to shew, that there can be, strictly and properly speaking, nothing *antecedent* to the Will of God: for since his Will brought all things into being, and made them what they are, is it not a fallacy in reasoning, to argue upon their supposed relations and fitnesses as *prior* to that which gave them existence? This is put in a very strong light by Dr. Felton, in the Preface to his L. M. Lectures p. xxxiv.—xxxvi.

P. 92. l. 4. *That these supposed eternal relations and fitnesses are as binding upon God himself, as they are upon his creatures.*] "That God is included equally with his creatures, and equally subject with them to some rule, or law, is by these writers rudely asserted, when they are repeating over and over, God is obliged to *This*, and obliged to *That*.—But surely it may be said, in the highest and most excellent sense, that God is a *Law unto Himself*; that there is no *Law extrinsic, previous, or superior to Him*;



and that the *Law* of his *Actions* is no other than the *Freedom* and *Perfections* of his *Nature*. There is a difference between the *Rule* which God observeth Himself, and the *Law* which he prescribeth to all other *Agents*; and in this difference, with regard to *Obligation*, lieth the true distinction between a *Rule* and a *Law*.—The *Rule*, therefore, which God observeth is improperly called a *Law*, with reference to Himself: it is a *Rule* of his own making, as the *Model* is entirely of his own designing. But the same *Rule* is a *Law* to the whole Creation: it is the *Law* of their motions, influences, and operations; and although they must constantly observe this *Law*, forasmuch as they cannot alter nor interrupt the course of it, yet God, the great Lord of the *Universe*, can interpose at his pleasure, and alter, divert, and suspend those *Laws* of *Nature*, which He hath given. At His great bidding, the *Moon* shall stand still, and the *Sun* shall not haste to go down: the *Waters* also shall stand on a heap, and the *Fire* shall have no force on the servants of God: the *WORD* who created, can also heal, and restore, and raise the sick, the lame, the blind, and the dead. In the moral world also, He is free, at his good pleasure, and in his own good time, to make what creatures he pleaseth, angels, or men, or other different forms of intelligent beings, which we know not: and He can place them also in what relations to each other he pleaseth: and although without His interposition the moral duties must go on in a perpetual tenor, yet, at His bidding, the *Child* shall obey God rather than his *Parents*, and the Parent shall offer up his *Son* unto God: Men shall act against the strongest propensities of *Nature*, and forsake father and mother, wife and children, yea, and their own lives also, notwithstanding the great fundamental *Law* of *Self-preservation*; and all this they shall do upon the principles of *Natural Religion* as well as *Revealed*; for, if there be any reason and fitness in any thing, it is above all things fit and reasonable that God should be obeyed. All obligation proceedeth from Him, but none can revert upon Him, but what in his *Promises* and *Covenants* He hath taken upon Himself. There is no Necessity to constrain His *Actions*; and there is no *Law* but his own eternal *Wisdom*, to direct them. The *Rule* of his *Actions* is seen in the manner of his acting, and floweth from the infinite perfections of his *Essence* for ever.” Felton’s L. M. Lect. Pref. p. xlvii.—l.

P. 93. l. 21. What is that Nature which can set bounds to Him? “Is any thing a perfection to God, but Himself?—Can any thing be a Rule to God, that is not Himself?—Does He consult or follow any thing but what is

one with His own Divine Nature and Essence?"—Norris on Reason and Faith, p. 165.

P. 94. l. 9. *It should seem, however, that some have been led to adopt these theories, from a pious desire of removing from the Creator the imputation of caprice or arbitrary proceedings.*] One of the acutest Writers on this side of the question, in modern times, is the author of *Ben Mordecai's Letters*, who strenuously contends, that Right and Wrong are not dependent on the Will of God, but on the Truth and Nature of things, which are the foundation of the Divine Will. I do not find, however, that this Writer has put the subject in a stronger or clearer light than Dr. Cudworth, who had already taken the same ground, and had discussed the point in a more close and argumentative manner than Ben Mordecai. The substance of his reasoning may be seen in the following passages: "Is it possible that the same action, and under the same circumstances, should be just, when performed by *one* Being, and unjust when performed by *another*?"—"The Christian Religion does not suffer us to exalt God's absolute Will and Power at the expense of his moral character; as if it depended wholly on His Will, that virtue is preferable to vice; and not upon it's own intrinsic Nature. But it teaches what is true in fact: that Rectitude is unchangeable, independent, and eternal; and no more the subject of Power or Will, than necessary Existence."—"If Right and Wrong depend on mere Will and Power, there can be no such thing as Goodness or Justice, or moral Excellence of any kind, even in God Himself: because if He had acted the very reverse of what He always has done, (which may very justly be supposed, if it had been in it's own Nature equally right) His actions, according to *this* notion, would have been equally *just*, and *good*, and *praise-worthy*, as they now are."—"He could not be merciful, nor just, nor true, in annexing Damnation to the vicious actions of his creatures, if Virtue and Vice depended on mere arbitrary Will; and the Vice which He condemns was in it's own Nature equally meritorious with the Virtue which He rewards."—"For, arbitrary Will, as it makes no difference or alteration in the things *themselves*, can be no ground or reason of preference to an intelligent Being."—"But, in truth, God does not make one thing right and another wrong; one thing morally good, and another thing morally evil; but only *reveals* to us their several Natures." See Letter 5. p. 606—609, 8vo. edit. containing much more to the same effect. Now, all the difficulties here stated appear to arise from supposing the Almighty to be "*such*

an one as ourselves," in whom *Power* and *Will* may be separated from, and even in opposition to *Rectitude* and *Goodness*, and consequently may, if *arbitrarily* exercised, be productive of *evil* as well as *good*. But if we take into consideration the *inseparable harmony* of the *Divine* Attributes, all these difficulties vanish, God's *Power* and *Will* can never be at variance with *Rectitude* and *Goodness*, because these latter Attributes as *essentially* belong to Him as the former. To suppose otherwise, is to frame the most absurd and impious notions of the Supreme Being, such as would make it impossible for us either to believe or to trust in Him. This inseparable union of perfections, moral and intellectual, in the Divine character, is the very foundation of all our faith, and fear, and love towards Him. This it is, which certifies us that He can will nothing but what is holy, just, and good: because whatever is willed by such a Being, must necessarily bear the stamp of His perfections. Being assured of this, we want no other argument, to prove, that *implicit obedience to His Will* is, on our part, the only certain criterion of *Moral Rectitude*: and that when we have competent evidence that God hath spoken to us, acquiescence in His commands becomes our bounden duty. This does not, however, preclude us from considering the *intrinsic excellence and utility* of what is declared to us on the authority of God, provided we presume not to set our judgment in competition with His, who made all things what they are, who (as this author himself acknowledges) hath *revealed* them to us, and whose knowledge of their relations and properties is alone infinite and infallible.—With respect to the supposed *danger* of ascribing *Moral Rectitude* to the *arbitrary Will* of God, I beg leave to strengthen what I have already advanced, by adding the following important observations of Dr. Felton. "To object that if *Moral Truth* be not independent of the *Will* of God, it is of a *precarious* nature, and dependeth upon His *arbitrary* determination, whether it shall be *Truth* or not; this is a false and blasphemous consequence, arguing from human *Will* to the *Divine*, as if the *Divine Will* were mutable as our's, and to be *arbitrary* implied at least a power and possibility of *Evil*, as well as *Good*, in the counsels and actions of the Almighty. Thus indeed they argue; but surely they mistake the very *Essence* of God, as if falsehood and wrong could ever enter into it, or as if His *arbitrary Will* could ever decree any thing contrary to his *essential* perfections. Whereas He is *arbitrary*, merely from his own immutable perfections; so that He can decree nothing but what is consonant to

His eternal goodness and truth: and every contradiction to His Will is therefore false and evil.”—“The difference between God and his creatures, is this: God is *arbitrary* in all his counsels, and all his works, both as to the designment and accomplishment of them, in such absolute Truth and Perfection, that *what* He willeth is always *just*, and *what* He doth is always *right*.—But when we say that *Man* is *arbitrary*, we do not only include the freedom, but more especially the obliquity and perverseness of his Will. In God, to act *arbitrarily* implieth the highest *Liberty*, for He acteth solely from the motives of infinite Goodness and Wisdom: in *Man*, to act *arbitrarily* implieth an Imperfection, a capacity to act in violation of, or in conformity to, his duty. Man, such is his weakness, may vainly attempt to make Virtue Vice, and Vice Virtue. This power some of the greatest patrons of Natural Religion, and enemies of Revelation, have ascribed unto Man; but they cannot, without equal weakness and wickedness, ascribe it unto God.—To say, that if God be *arbitrary*, He may change the nature of good and evil, is blasphemously to charge the weakness and folly of men upon the indefectible perfections of God.” Felton’s L. M. Lect. pref. p. xxxvii.—xl.

P. 95. l. 12. *neither is it, strictly speaking, immutable, since God may change it, whenever He sees fit.*] This point is ably discussed by Dr. Ellis, (Knowledge of Divine Things, p. 420—425,) who clearly shews, that this supposed immutability of relations is inconsistent with the Divine proceedings; and that all the Creatures that we know of have changed those relations they once stood in; which is instanced in the Fall of the Angels, the Fall of Man, and the change that thereby took place in the relation between God and Man, and Man and the rest of the Creation.

## SERMON XVI.

P. 101. l. ult. *Metaphysics.*] “The science of Metaphysics has been defined *the science of the principles and causes of all things existing*. Hence *Mind*, or Intelligence, and especially the *Supreme Intelligence*, which is the Cause of the Universe, and of every thing which it contains, is the principal subject of this Science. It is called by Aristotle the *First Philosophy*: but what is first to *Nature*, is not first to *Man*. Nature begins with *causes*, which produce *effects*. Man begins with *effects*, and by them ascends to *causes*. All human study and investigation pro-



ceed from sensible to intelligible, from body, the effect, to mind, the cause. *Physics* being the name given to the philosophy of *body*; the term *Metaphysics*, as denoting something more properly *subsequent to Physics*, is used to express the Philosophy of *Mind*." Encyclopædia Britannica. Art. *Metaphysics*. See also Dr. Tatham's Bampton Lect. vol. 1. ch. 2, 4.

P. 102. l. 6. *The Father of English Philosophy.*] See Lord Bacon's Advancement of Learning, b. 3. ch. 4. in which he descants largely on the proper acceptation of the term *Metaphysics*, and points out it's just limits as a Science, distinct, in some respects, from *Physics*, though like it conversant only with *natural* objects; and distinct also from *Theology*, whose object is the knowledge of things *Divine* and *above Nature*. He also shews, in what respects the Science of *Metaphysics*, thus defined, differs from that which was dignified, by the Ancients, with the appellation of *Primitive Philosophy*; which was of a more *general* character, and seemed rather to embrace the whole extent of Philosophy physical and theological, than to have any appropriate object of it's own, which might distinguish it as a Science *sui generis*.

Ibid. l. 25. *With what difficulty and embarrassment such investigations are attended, &c.*] "That such *effects* flow from such *properties*, and that the *properties* of things are known by their *effects*, is certain; but that we do, or can, therefore know the *real essences* of things, or the *manner*, how such *effects* flow constantly from such *causes* or *properties*, no man can reasonably infer. The various *hypotheses* raised to solve the several *phenomena* and *operations* of *Nature*, are a full acknowledgment of the *facts*, and as full a proof of our *ignorance* of the real inward *essence* and construction of bodies, and of the *reasons* and *manner* of their *operations* in the several *effects* they produce; and therefore we must *own the fact*, though we cannot *assign the reason* of it. All therefore beyond this conclusion, that each *specific* body hath it's own determinate and *specific properties*, known by certain and uniform *effects* constantly flowing from them, is mere conjecture, and random aim, which can never hit the mark, and discover the *real essences* of things, as they are in themselves." Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 131.

P. 103. l. 16. *Neither does it seem possible, however skillful we may be in the exercise of our powers of mental abstraction, &c.*] "In reality, the most minute and contemptible of created *Essences* escape our knowledge, and are so far from being found out unto perfection, that they still



are secrets to us. What we see and feel, and taste and handle, what we most intimately, most familiarly, converse with, we yet apprehend no otherwise than with a very dark and superficial knowledge. With the *properties* of *matter* our Senses do indeed acquaint us, that it is hard or soft, round or square, black or white, &c. but the support of these properties, that which makes them to be what they severally are, it's Essence or Substance, (a *name* we have given to a *thing* we understand not,) this is mysterious still and dark to us; and we are upon the whole as little acquainted with it as with the nature of Spirit. Nay, as forward as we may be in searching, and as peremptory as we may be in pronouncing, we do yet for ourselves deliberate, choose, discourse, and enquire, without knowing how, without understanding the Principle by which we perform these several operations. We *live*, without knowing what *Life* is: nay, we *reason*, without understanding *what* that is which *reasons*. We can say, indeed, what it is *not*; but cannot, with any clearness or certainty, define what it *is*." Dr. Marshall's Sermons, vol. 1. p. 86. See also Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 81—90, where are some admirable reflections on Metaphysical Abstractions, and their incompetency to give us clear and just conceptions of spiritual objects.

P. 104. l. 18. *What is the result of the most sublime discoveries in this boasted Philosophy of Mind?*] "Even in the pursuits of *human Science*, where Reason can do most, all the efforts of the ablest understanding penetrate but a little way. We know enough of the *nature of things*, to serve the purposes of common life, and enough of the *nature of Man*, to discover our duty towards each other. And within this narrow circle all our knowledge, be we as proud of it as we please, is confined. Clouds and darkness cover the rest; and this the ablest men at all times have seen and confessed. If there be a man, whom Heaven has formed with greater powers and stronger faculties than are commonly met with in the species, he is the first to discover, and to lament, his own blindness and weakness: a Socrates and a Pascal have been considered as prodigies of parts and ingenuity: yet, while the meanest Sophister is puffed up with the conceit of his own knowledge, these divine men confess nothing so readily as their own ignorance. And, if this be the case of human learning, what must we think of *Divine*? where Reason teaches nothing beyond the existence and attributes of God, and, as to every thing else, without the aid of *Revelation*, is stark blind. *The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God*, is an

assertion, to which common sense and common experience must assent. Yet shall every idle speculatist, who has but the confidence to call himself a Philosopher, treat the *Divine word* as freely as any ordinary subject; and pronounce as peremptorily of the *revealed Will of God*, which the Angels themselves adore in silence, as if he knew for certain that his poor and scanty understanding was commensurate with *the councils of the Most High*." Bp. Hurd's Sermons, vol. 1. p. 226. See also Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. 1. §. 8. p. 26.

P. 105. l. 12. *Theology springs from another and a higher source.*] See Bacon's Advancement of Learning, b. 9. and Tatham's Bampton Lect. vol. 2. introduct. ch. 1, and ch. 2. sect. 1. in which *the Logic of Theology, the Theological Principle, and the grounds and methods of Reasoning in Divinity*, are stated with great perspicuity.

P. 109. l. 5. *the necessity of Faith, or something similar to it, even in the common affairs of life, and in every branch of human Science, &c.*] This is exceedingly well illustrated in Mr. Morres's Bampton Lect. Sermon. 1. p. 5—11.

P. 110. l. 7. *Divine Truth depends as little upon Sight, or sensible demonstration, for the certainty of it's doctrines.*] "Objects of Faith," says Dr. Felton, "as such, are not capable of *sensible evidence*, and *strict demonstration*. Faith is properly built, though on a *divine assurance*, yet in the last resolve on *moral evidence*; for, so the *divine assurance* itself is established.—Faith may be built on *Facts*, of which mankind hath had *sensible evidence*, &c. but the inferences, that these are good proofs that therefore there is a Divine Being, that Christ is the Son of God, and so on, these are the work of Reason, by which we arrive at a *moral certainty*, and though we build remotely on *sensitive evidence* and *demonstration*, yet the deductions we make from them are not capable of the same *demonstration*. Thus, *astronomical demonstrations* may be applied as *mediums* to prove the Being of a God; but it is the Heavens, and not God, which is the subject of them. So when Miracles are first proved by *sensible Evidence*, the proof, to us, is like that of other facts we are not eyewitnesses of, by *moral evidence* only." L. M. Lect. p. 26.

Ibid. l. 14. *our assent to the truths so revealed is grounded solely on the Authority by which they are declared.*] On this point the venerable and judicious Hooker thus expresses himself: "Because we maintain, that in Scripture we are taught all things necessary unto Salvation, hereupon very childishly it is by some demanded, what Scripture can teach us the Sacred Authority of the Scripture, upon the knowledge

whereof our whole Faith and Salvation dependeth? As though there were any kind of Science in the world which leadeth men unto knowledge, without presupposing a number of things already known. No Science doth make known the first principles whereon it buildeth; but they are always either taken as plain and manifest in themselves, or as proved and granted already, some former knowledge having made them evident. Scripture teacheth all supernaturally revealed truth, without the knowledge whereof Salvation cannot be attained. The main principle whereupon our belief of all things contained therein dependeth, is, that the Scriptures are the Oracles of God himself. This in itself we cannot say is evident. For, then all men that hear it, would acknowledge it in heart, as they do when they hear that "every whole is more than a part of that whole;" because this is in itself evident: the other we know that all do not acknowledge when they hear it. There must therefore be some former knowledge presupposed, which doth herein assure the hearts of all Believers. Scripture teacheth us that saving Truth, which God hath discovered unto the world by Revelation; and it presumeth us taught otherwise, that itself is Divine and Sacred." Eccl. Polity, b. 3. §. 8. p. 139. edit. 1705.

P. 120. l. 5. *With respect to certainty, it claims indeed the preeminence above all human Science whatever, &c.*] "Though what I do really and actually *know*, be to the full as true and certain as what I *believe*, and I can no more be out in the one than in the other, yet it is more certain in the general that God *cannot deceive me*, than that *my Reason cannot be deceived*. Not that what I assent to by Divine Faith can have a greater objective certainty than what I clearly and distinctly perceive or know, but only that there is a possibility, not to say danger, of my taking that for a clear and distinct perception, which indeed is not so: and so, though I cannot be deceived in what I do truly know, yet I may be deceived in thinking that I know, when I do not. So that Divine Faith, though not more certain than Knowledge itself, is yet of greater certainty than our *knowing faculties*; and, generally speaking, the Believer goes upon surer grounds than the man of Reason and Demonstration. Because his *Reason* may possibly lead him into error, whereas the other's *Authority* cannot. And when they are both in the right, yet still there will be this difference between them, that his Reason is only *not deceived*, whereas the other's Faith is *infallible*." Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. 2. the whole of which deserves a very attentive consideration.

P. 122. l. 9. *It is not to be doubted, that God requires us to walk by Faith, for the purpose of correcting our pride, &c.]* See Dr. Balguy's Sermons, Disc. 8. *on the Difficulties which attend the Study of Religion* ; and also his Fourth Charge, *on the distinct Provinces of Reason and Faith.*

P. 125. l. 7. *Faith in a Revelation attested by sufficient external evidence of it's coming from God, is in itself the highest act of Reason.]* "The Truth and Revelation of God do jointly make up the formal Reason of Divine Faith, which accordingly proceeds upon this double principle, 1. That whatever God reveals is true ; 2. That this or that thing in particular is revealed by God. For, Faith has it's Reasons as well as Science, (though of another nature,) and it's Reasons are these two, as will more distinctly appear, by disposing the process of Faith into a syllogistical form, which will be this:—*Whatever is revealed by God is true. This is revealed by God,—Therefore this is true.* Now 'tis most apparent that these two Principles are both of them sufficiently clear, or at least may be so. 'Tis clear, in the first place, that whatever is revealed by God is true. This is either self-evident, or may be proved from the idea of God ; and so has either the light of a Principle, or of a Conclusion, either an immediate or a mediate Evidence. And it may be also clear, (and to be sure is so, whenever our Faith is well-grounded,) that such a thing in particular is revealed by God. And in both these respects it is true, (what is commonly said,) that *Faith is the highest Reason.* For you see it is perfectly reasonable in it's Fund and Principle, and does at last resolve, as much as any Mathematical Conclusion, into a rational ground of unquestionable Light and Evidence. With this only difference, that a Conclusion in Geometry is founded upon a ground taken from *within*, from the intrinsic nature of the thing, whereas our Conclusion of Faith proceeds upon a ground taken from *without*, viz. from the Authority of God, but such as however in Light and Evidence is no way inferior to the other." Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. 2. §. 14. p. 70.

P. 126. l. 6. *they must ultimately rest on one or other of two suppositions, which are both of them palpably false, the Perfection of Man, or the Imperfection of God.]* "He that would contribute any thing to the stopping this contagion of *Religious Scepticism*, that now reigns among us, ought in the first place to consider the reason of it, what it is that makes men so disposed to waver in their Religion, and so ready to part with the great Articles and Mysteries of it. Now to this purpose I call to mind a very considerable observation of *Des Cartes* concerning Atheism, which I



take to be equally applicable to Infidelity, particularly to this of the Mysteries of our Christian Faith. The observation is this, *That those things which are commonly alleged by Atheists to impugn the Existence of God, do all turn upon this, that either we attribute some human affection to God, or else arrogate so great force and penetration to our own minds, as to go about to comprehend and determine what God can, and ought to do. So that if we would but carry about us this thought, that our minds are to be considered as finite, but God as Incomprehensible and Infinite, there would be no further difficulty in any of their objections.* Thus that very acute and judicious person concerning the grounds of Atheism. And in like manner, I think it may be said of Infidelity, as to the Mysteries of Christianity: that the great reason why so many who call themselves Christians do so obstinately cavil at them and dispute them, is that they either think too meanly of God, or too highly of *themselves*; that they either ascribe something *human* to *His* Nature, or something *Divine* to *their own*; that either they set too narrow limits to the Divine Power and Greatness, or carry out too far those of their own understanding; in one word, that either they *humanize* God, or *deify themselves* and their own rational Abilities." Norris, as above, Introduct. §. 6. p. 8.

## SERMON XVII.

P. 132. l. 6. *it is necessary, that we clearly understand in what sense the term Reason is used, when it is spoken of as the criterion of Truth.*] The limited powers of human Reason in judging of Divine Truth, are laid down with great precision and clearness, in Norris's Account of Reason and Faith, ch. 1, 4. Bp. Taylor's Duct. Dub. b. 1. ch. 2. rule 3. p. 40—62. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, b. 4. ch. 17, 18. Abp. Laud's Conference with Fisher, p. 74—80. Lord Bacon's Advancement of Learning, b. 9. Watts's Logic, introduction. Tatham's Bampt. Lect. vol. 1. ch. 4. and Dr. Randolph's Sermon on 2 Cor. iii. 5. vol. 2. p. 26.

P. 136. l. 7. *It professes to disclose Truths, highly interesting to man, and absolutely necessary to his well-being, of which natural Reason knows nothing, and can conceive nothing.*] "Revealed Religion, as contradistinguished to Natural, containeth all those points, which it is impossible for the Thought of man to discover, or come to the knowledge of any other way. Such are the *Existence* and *Nature* of *Angels*; the several *Prophecies* concerning future events; the *Purpose* and *Counsel* of God in the *Redemption* of the *World*; the *Execution* of that Purpose; the *Reconciliation*



of his *Mercy* and *Justice* in the great *Satisfaction* for the *Sins of the whole World*. And in the opening of this Scene, are discovered the great *Mysteries* of the GODHEAD; the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST concurring and co-operating in the Salvation of mankind; together with those great and sublime Truths relating to each of these Divine Persons: all these, and more particularly those concerning the SON, the second Person of this glorious *Trinity*, in his *Incarnation* and *Birth*; the *Distinction* of his *Natures*, and the *Unity* of *Person*; his *eternal* and *temporal* Generation; are most eminently the *Doctrines of Revelation*." Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 111.

P. 136. l. 22. *But without some proof of his real knowledge of these points, his objections must be regarded as the objections of ignorance only.*] "In points of pure Revelation, as we could have known *nothing* of them unless they had been *revealed*, we cannot know *any thing* of them *further* than they are *revealed*. This is a most evident Proposition, and till any person is hardy enough to deny it, I shall not stay to prove it. Whether so much is *revealed* as our present faculties are capable of receiving, is a question which may serve to exercise the wits and sagacity of men; but that we cannot imagine any point *beyond* what is *revealed*, is as undeniable as that, with reference to the Universe, we cannot form to ourselves any *idea*, *notion*, or *conception*, beyond the verge of created Nature. If therefore there be *some* Truths which cannot be known at all without *Revelation*, and can be known no *further* than they are *revealed*; then, all attempts to account for and unravel the *mysterious* parts of *Revelation* are vain, and only fit to raise so many *Heresies* upon so many dissonant and precarious *suppositions*, according to every different *hypothesis* which the wayward wit of Heretics and Unbelievers hath in all ages invented, in direct contradiction to the Apostle's assertion, *the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*." Felton's L. M. Lect. p. 112.

P. 137. l. 19. *we do not lessen either the utility or the dignity of human Reason, by thus confining the exercise of it within those natural boundaries which the Creator himself hath assigned to it.*] "We not only acknowledge the use of Reason in Religion, but also that 'tis in Religion that 'tis chiefly to be used: so far are we from denying the use of it there. And it is a little unfairly done of our Adversaries, so much to insinuate the contrary as they do.—This I say is an unfair insinuation, and such as argues some want either of judgment or sincerity in those that suggest it. For they seem plainly, by running so much upon this vein, to imply as

if it were part of the question between us, whether there be any use of Reason in Religion, or whether Faith is to be founded upon Reason, or no. But now this is no part of the controversy that lies between us. We acknowledge the use of Reason in Religion, as well as they; and are as little for a senseless and irrational Faith as they can be. This therefore, being common to us both, is no part of the question: and they do ill to insinuate that it is, by so many popular declamatory strains upon the reasonableness of Religion, and, in particular, of Faith, whereas they do, or should know, that the thing in question between us, is not whether there be any use to be made of Reason in believing, but only what it is, or wherein the true use of it does consist." Norris on Reason and Faith, ch. 8. §. 5. p. 288. "The Infidels," says Bishop Horne, "have not ground for the surmise, that we want to deprive them of God's best gift. We wish only to teach them the right use of it. Reason is not the first and only Revelation from God; for it is, properly speaking, no Revelation at all. Man, at his creation, was not left so much as a single day to Reason. It is the *Eye*, not the *Light*. It can with certainty know nothing of the things of another world, but by information from thence. To this truth the writings of the best and wisest among the Heathen Philosophers bear a testimony irrefragable and insurmountable. It is the faculty which enables us upon proper evidence to receive, and after due study to understand such information. And blessed is he, who, at the return of his Lord to judgment, shall be found to have so employed it." Letters on Infidelity, p. 298. 1st edit. 1784.

P. 138. l. 16. *Here the authority of Reason ceases.*] See Locke's Essay, b. 4. ch. 18. sect. 7, 8, 9. Wollaston also says, towards the conclusion of his *Religion of Nature delineated*, that "whatever is immediately revealed from God must, as well as any thing else, be treated as being *what it is*: which cannot be, if it is not *treated with the highest regard, believed, and obeyed*." Does not this proposition (which is certainly as true as any in Mr. W.'s book) virtually do away the utility of the greater part of his elaborate Treatise?

For much important matter on the province of Reason in judging of Revelation, I would earnestly recommend the *Theological* writings of the Hon. MR. BOYLE; an Epitome of which was published in 3 vols. 8vo. 1715. No man had more thoroughly considered the extent and limits of the human understanding: none, perhaps, ever combined more perfectly the characters of the Philosopher

and the Theologian. See particularly, vol. 1. Appendix, *on the reconcilableness of Reason and Religion* : vol. 2. b. 1. ch. 1. 2. *the Christian Virtuoso* : vol. 3. ch. 1, 2, *on the excellence of Theology, or the preeminence of the study of Divinity above that of Natural Philosophy* ; ch. 6. *on the high veneration Man's intellect owes to God* ; ch. 7, 8. *on things above Reason*.

P. 139. l 14. *Seeming contradictions may also occur.*] Dr. Marshall, in an admirable Sermon on *what Degrees of Knowledge we may arrive at in our inquiries after God*, has the following observations. "In the manner of his Existence there are heights and depths, of *sundry* kinds, which, with all the helps afforded us from *human Reason* and *Divine Revelation*, do yet remain unfathomable. I will instance in two particulars ; the *one* whereof is in some degree discoverable by *human Reason* ; whilst the knowledge we have of the *other* is purely owing to *Divine Revelation*. 1. Our own Reason assures us in the strongest terms, that something or other must needs have been *eternal*. Run back as far as you will, your thoughts come at last to a stand, and you must fix upon some Original, some Beginning, some Cause of things which had nothing before, nothing prior to it. Thus far your notion is clear enough, and you understand yourself, whilst you affirm and assert it. But if you pursue it a little farther, you will presently be plunged. For, when you come to consider the *modus* of *Eternity*, and the manner of existence in a Being which hath been from Everlasting, your Reason will sink under you, and will be lost in the Abyss of such a profound inquiry. Since you must conceive this Eternity, either *without* a Succession of Time, or *with* it. *One* or *other* of these ways is absolutely necessary. And yet the *one* looks very much like a contradiction, whilst the *other* is mere unintelligible jargon. For to talk, in the language of the Schoolmen, of a permanent Eternity, an *infinite Now*, as if God coexisted, or existed together with all the several parts and successions of Time, *past* and *future*, as well as the *present* moment ; as if his being were equally and universally spread over all the possible periods of Duration, and nothing to Him were *past* or *future*, but all were in like manner, and ever *present* with Him, in a sense peculiar to the boundless Nature of his Incomprehensible Being ; for ought I can object against it, may possibly be *true* ; but yet most sure I am, that it is utterly *unintelligible*. On the other hand, the *succession* of Time by different parts and portions of hours, or days, or years, are ne'er a whit more conceivable in an eternal



duration. For if an infinity of *years* or of duration be now past and gone, some period of time must needs be assignable, wherein each of them *once* was *present*, and so had a *beginning*; which is a flat *contradiction* to the nature and notion of Eternity. Yet either *this seeming contradiction*, or the other unintelligible Notion, is the only way we have of conceiving any Cause or Being which hath existed from everlasting. Now, in the *one* or the *other* of these ways (*both unintelligible, both inconceivable*) there is a necessity of acknowledging somewhat to have always existed. Our Reason starts this difficulty to us, and leaves us in the midst of it; which methinks should the more easily reconcile us to *another* difficulty in the *manner* of God's Existence, as represented to us from *Divine Revelation*, and this comes (2.) next in order to be considered. For, as in the *former* instance our Reason assures us of an *Eternal* Being, but helps us to no fit lights or mediums, for conceiving the *manner* of an *eternal duration*; so in the doctrine of this day, [*viz. the Trinity*,] and in those *eminent distinctions* which the Scriptures have asserted in the Deity between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we know neither the *principle* which so diversifies them, nor upon what those several *relations* are founded, nor what is the *manner* of their *distinct subsistence*." The learned Author then goes on to a particular consideration of the difficulties of this doctrine; and contends, that "if things which *reason* represents as *certain* be utterly *inexplicable* in the manner of their existence, the same privilege and protection may with all *reason* be pleaded for the Truths of *Revelation*, and both will stand or fall by one and the same scrutiny." See his sermons, vol. 1. serm. 4. See also Mr. Boyle's Theolog. Works epitomized, vol. 1. Appendix on the *Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion*.

P. 140. l. 18. *Many things are reasonably to be believed, nay, must be believed, on sure and certain grounds of conviction, though they are absolutely incomprehensible by our understandings.*] "If the great patrons of Reason are indeed persuaded, that what is above Reason is a contradiction to it, and that Reason can assent to no Truth but what it comprehends, I must take the freedom to say, their Reason is not so well exercised as it should be, and if what they assert be true, it is confined in a much narrower compass than they imagine. At this rate they may argue against their own only standards of knowledge, *sensible evidence and demonstration*, and dispute for ever about causes and effects, the properties and appearances of things, till they can find the Reason of every property, and see into the

Essences themselves. In experimental philosophy, we are assured of the *facts*, though in many instances we can only guess at the *causes*, and the *manner* of their operation. Nature hath her secrets, and if you please her mysteries. The Divisibility of Quantity; the Quadrature of the Circle; the properties of the Loadstone, its electral powers and constant attachment to the North; are articles to exercise the Faith of these Philosophers, when they shall find that Demonstration lieth on both sides of the question; that what can be demonstrated cannot be effected; and that properties are manifest, which our Reason is not able to account for.—*Moral* Philosophy hath its difficulties also; and these boasted reasoners may dispute whether they be reasonable creatures and free agents, till they can settle wherein the freedom of will and liberty of action consist, and whether they act freely by their own determination, or are impelled and secretly conducted by a fatal necessity.—But if truths *natural* and *moral* have their difficulties, and we cannot always account for the cause and manner of natural operations, why should we imagine that *supernatural* truths should lie more open to our comprehension? Felton's L. M. Lect. pref. p. 5—7. A similar view of the subject is also taken, and illustrated in an admirable manner, by Mr. Boyle, in his Treatise just referred to, p. 398—413; and by Dr. Jenkin, in his *Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2. chap. i. p. 26—35.

P. 141. l. 3. *The ground on which we believe such things, is the strength and certainty of the evidence with which they are accompanied; and this is precisely the ground on which we are required to believe the truths of Revealed Religion.*] Mr. Boyle very pertinently observes, “that provided the information be credible, and which we clearly understand, it matters not whether we have it by Reason, as it is taken for the faculty furnished only with it's innate notions and common observations; or some philosophical theory; or experiments purposely contrived; or testimonies human or Divine, which we call Revelation; *these being but different ways of informing the understanding*: and if these informations have the lately mentioned conditions, let the understanding receive them which way it will, it may safely reason and draw inferences from them.” And again, “Since these strange *phenomena* [viz. of Magnetism, &c.] are not only believed, but a great many inferences drawn from them, without any reflection upon them that assent to the things and the inferences, why should it be unreasonable to believe *the testimony of God*, either about His Nature, which He can best and most fully know; or about what He hath done,



as the Creation of the World and of Man; or which He means to do, as the destroying the World, the Resurrection, &c. For, I think the Apostle says very well, *if we receive the testimony of Men, the testimony of God is greater*, especially relating to his own Nature, Will, and Purposes; since Reason, by its own light, cannot give us the knowledge of them. So that Christians assenting to doctrines revealed, neither need, nor do reject the authority of Reason, only appeal from Reason *more slightly*, to it's dictates *more fully informed*. Of which two nothing is more reasonable than to prefer the latter to the former." See his Theol. Works, as above, vol. 1. p. 413—415.

P. 141. l. 28. *On these great subjects, it propounds several doctrines which Infidels treat as foolishness.*] Some valuable observations in vindication of the doctrines of Christianity against the exceptions of Unbelievers, may be found in Dr. Balguy's 8th and 9th Discourses, and in his 4th Charge *on the distinct provinces of Reason and Faith*, already referred to. But a more full and satisfactory discussion of the whole controversy between Christians and Deists, respecting the great leading articles of the Christian Faith, is contained in Bp. Sherlock's incomparable Discourses. See particularly the seven first Discourses of vol. 1. the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of vol. 2, and the 2nd and 3rd of vol. 4.

P. 142. l. 5. *With respect to the Godhead, or Divine Nature, it is acknowledged, that the doctrine of Revelation is incomprehensible by human Reason.*] "We acknowledge," says Mr. Leslie, "a great and sublime mystery in the holy Trinity of God. That is a mystery to us which exceeds our understanding; and many such mysteries there are, to us, in the Nature of God which we all acknowledge: A First Cause without a beginning; A Being, which neither made itself, nor was made by any other; Infinite without extension! In every place, yet circumscribed in no place! Eternal and perpetually existing, without any succession of time! A present without past or future! And many other such unexplainable, unintelligible, incomprehensible mysteries; which yet hinder not our belief of a God. And therefore not being able fully and clearly to explain the Trinity, which is the very Nature of God, can be no reason for us to reject such a Revelation which God has given us of himself. Yet do we not want several shadows and resemblances of one nature communicating itself to many individuals, without either a multiplication or division of the nature. We say that the soul is all in all, and all in every part of the body; yet that the soul is neither multiplied nor divided among the

several members of the body. It is impossible for us either to explain this, or to deny it; for we feel it to be so, though it is wholly unconceivable to us how it can be." *Socinian Controversy*, letter 1. §. 4. See his Works, vol. 1. p. 214. To the same effect argues that great philosopher, Mr. Boyle:—"Among things that seem not rational in Religion, I make a great difference betwixt those in which unenlightened Reason is manifestly a competent judge, and those which natural Reason itself may discern to be out of it's sphere.—If God is a being different from all others, some things in his *nature and manner of existence* must be without analogy in inferior beings: for even in Man, the Co-existence and Union of the Soul and Body is without a precedent or parallel in Nature. And though the *truth* of this Union may be, the *manner* was never proved, nor ever will be clearly understood in this life.—And if God vouchsafes to discover to us, in respect of His Nature and Attributes, what we cannot know without His information; and since we know that whatever He says must be true; we have more reason to believe what He says of Himself and of Divine things, than what we should be able to guess at about them, by the analogy of things of an infinitely distant nature, or maxims formed according to the nature of inferior things. If then He reveals to us, that there is in the Godhead three distinct Persons, which make one God: since we believe God's testimony in all other cases, we ought to believe it concerning Himself, and acknowledge, that in an Incomprehensible Being there may be unparalleled manner of Existence, though we cannot understand it; since in ourselves we cannot comprehend how a Body and an immaterial Spirit should be united, so as to make up one Man. And though, in such cases, our Reason seems to be captivated, yet our Reason obliges us to that submission; and he who believes what Divine Writings teach, rather than what he might imagine without information, does not renounce, but only suffers his Reason to be guided by an omniscient infallible Instructor, who can teach him more than his Reason, or any body else, could discover to him." *Theolog. Works epitomized*, vol. 1. p. 378. See also Felton's *L. M. Lect.* pref. 9.—16; and serm. 3. p. 98, 103, and 132.

P. 143. l. 20. *The Fall of Man, with the consequent corruption of our nature, is also a question which baffles philosophical investigation.*] "Unbelievers," says Bishop Sherlock, "may think we ask too much of them to be granted, when we argue upon this supposition, *that all are sinners, and are fallen short of the glory of God.* But as this is the supposition on which the Gospel uniformly proceeds,

pretending to no more than to provide means of salvation for sinners, whoever takes upon himself to question the reasonableness of the Gospel, must consider it as being what it pretends to be; otherwise he will not argue against the Gospel, but against something else formed in his own imagination. If, upon examination of the Gospel, it appears to be indeed, what it pretends to be, a means for saving sinners, you must necessarily come to one or other of the following resolutions: If you are conscious to yourself, that you are a sinner, you must gladly receive the remedy provided for you, and which upon examination you find to be proper for your case; or, if you are satisfied with yourself and want no help, you must reject it as unnecessary and improper in your case, and trust entirely to your own merit; and must appear before God, and demand Life and Immortality as due from his Justice and Equity, which you will not accept as a gift from his Grace and Mercy." Vol. 1. disc. 1. p. 55. See also *Jenkin's Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2. ch. 12, 13.

P. 144. l. 11. *The Redemption of Mankind by Jesus Christ, is another doctrine which calls for an entire deference of the human understanding to the authority of Him by whom it hath been revealed.*] "In what a maze must Reason be lost, in searching after the means of reconciliation and Redemption! How shall sin be punished, and yet the sinner saved? How shall the honour of God's government be vindicated in the face of all the world, and yet in the face of all the world the rebels justified and exalted? These are difficulties irreconcilable to human Reason and Nature: and yet they must be reconciled, or the world, once lost, must lie for ever under condemnation. The Religion that can adjust this difficulty, and can give us the clue to lead us through these mazes, in which human Reason must for ever wander, can only have *the Words of Eternal Life*; which *Words of Eternal Life* must necessarily abound with inconceivable mysteries, but with mysteries of Grace and Mercy. So far is it from being an objection against the Gospel of Christ, that it contains many wonderful mysteries of the hidden wisdom of God, that, as our case stands, without a mystery 'tis impossible for us to be saved. For, since Reason and Nature cannot find the means of rescuing Sinners from Punishment, and of making atonement to the Justice of God: since they cannot prescribe a proper satisfaction for Sin, in which the honour of God, and the salvation of men shall be at once consulted; since they cannot remedy the corruption that has spread through the race of man-

kind, or infuse new principles of virtue and holiness into the souls already subdued to the lust and power of Sin; since, if they could procure our pardon for what is past, they cannot secure us for the future from the same temptations, which, by fatal experience, we know we cannot withstand:—since, I say, these things cannot be done by the means of Reason and Nature, they must be done by such means as Reason and Nature know nothing of; that is, in other words, they must be done by *mysterious* means, of the propriety of which we can have no adequate notion or conception.” Bp. Sherlock’s Sermons, vol. i. p. 48. See also p. 59, 60. where the same reasoning is pursued with the energy and vivacity characteristic of this distinguished Writer. See also Jenkin’s Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 2. ch. 21.

P. 146. l. 6. *The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit afford another topic, &c.*] “The inquiry,” says Dr. Tottie, “is not *how*, or with what manner of agency, the Spirit of God works upon our Spirit, but whether it *does really* work upon it, or not. The connection between causes and effects is often visible and certain, where we are totally ignorant of the operation of the one, or the production of the other. This is universally the case in all the appearances of Nature. We know the natural principles that produce Vegetation; but *how* they produce it we cannot comprehend or explain. We know that Light gives form and colour to the creation, and that Sounds are conveyed by the vibrations of the Air; but how they occasion these different sensations, Reason and Learning are at a loss to account for. We know by the most certain experience of what passes within ourselves, that the Mind acts upon the Body, and the Body upon the Mind, and yet Philosophy will not take upon itself to give us any conception how either of these acts upon the other. And why may not Spirit act upon Spirit, as well as upon Body? Nor can it be any objection to the reality of this action, that we are ignorant how it is performed. And surely the Spirit of God may act upon the Spirit of Man, though the mode of his operation, in the spiritual, as well as in the material, world, may be very remote from our conception. In truth, it is altogether as unphilosophical as it is irreligious, to imagine that the universal infinite Spirit, which created all things, which sustains all things, and which is as intimately present to every being, as that Being is to itself, cannot, or does not, influence, direct, impel, or control, according to the purposes of his own Divine Providence, every creature of his own, which only lives and moves,



and has his being in Him." Tottie's Sermons, p. 131. See also Bp. Sherlock's Sermons, vol. 2. dis. 2, 3, 4; and Dr. Ridley's L. M. Lect. serm. 1. p. 40—46. edit. 1742.

P. 147. l. 8. *The efficacy of Faith, of Prayer, and of all external Ordinances in Religion.*] These are fully and ably vindicated against the cavils of Deistical Writers, (particularly of Lord Shaftesbury and Tindal,) in Smith's *Cure of Deism*, 2 vols. 8vo. 1736. On the doctrine of Grace and the Sacraments, see Nicholls's Conference with a Theist, vol. 1. p. 493—502. Jenkin's Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 2. ch. 25. Ridley's L. M. Lect. serm. 7, 8. Tottie's Discourses, serm. 7. Bp. Hurd's Sermons, vol. 2. serm. 18. On the Priesthood, see Hooker's Eccl. Polity, b. 5. §. 77, 78, 79. Hickes on the Christian Priesthood. Jones's Essay on the Church.

P. 148. l. 19. *objections which have been sometimes made to the Morality of the Gospel.*] These are considered at large in Nicholls's Conference, p. 473—494.

P. 149. l. 28. *the proper use of Reason is no more discouraged by the advocates of Revelation, than it is by the idolizers of Natural Religion.*] The following Extracts from Bp. Jeremy Taylor will shew how weakly they argue, who consider Faith and Reason as at variance with each other. "It is a weak and a trifling principle, which supposes faith and reason to be opposite: for, faith is but one way, by which our reason is instructed, and acquires the proper notices of things. For our reason or understanding apprehends things three several ways. The first is called *νόησις*, or the first notices of things abstract, of principles, and the *prima intelligibilia*, such as, the whole is greater than a part, good is to be chosen, &c. for these are objects of the simple understanding, congenite notices, concreated with the understanding. The second is called *διανόησις*, or discourse, i. e. such consequents and emanations, which the understanding draws from her first principles. And the third is *πίστις*, i. e. such things which the understanding assents to, upon the report, testimony, and affirmation of others, viz. by arguments extrinsecal to the nature of things, and by collateral and indirect principles. These three ways of knowing are in all faculties sacred and profane; for faith and reason do not divide Theology and Philosophy, but in every Science reason hath notices all these ways."—"Into the greatest mysteriousness of our Religion, and the deepest articles of Faith, we enter by our Reason. Not that we can prove every one of them by natural reason; but whosoever believes wisely, and not by chance, enters into his faith by the hand of reason, i. e.



hath causes and reasons why he believes.”—“If this be the greatest reason in the world, *God hath said it, therefore it is true*, it follows that all our faith relies on this one reason. But because this reason is of no use to us till the minor proposition be proved, and that it appear that God hath said it; and that, in the inquiry after *that*, we are to use all our reason; the consequent is, that, in the first and last, reason lends legs to faith, and nothing can be wisely believed, but what can by some rational inducement be proved.” Duct. Dub. b. 1. ch. 2. rule 3. n. 20, 21, 24, 65. There is much excellent reasoning to the same effect, in Abp. Laud’s *Conference with Fisher, the Jesuit*, p. 74—80, and in Norris’s *Account of Reason and Faith*, ch. 8. *wherein is shewn what is the true use of Reason in believing*.

P. 151. l. 5. *Reason has been called, even by Christian Writers, “the primary guide and ultimate test of Revelation.”*] This expression is used by Dr. Heathcote in his *Remarks on Dr. Patten’s Christian Apology*; and the same, in effect, has been said by many well-meaning Advocates for Revealed Religion, in their zeal to convince Unbelievers of the Reasonableness of Christianity.

### SERMON XVIII.

P. 167. l. 4. *When they resort to palpable artifices, in order to discredit Revelation.*] See Saurin’s Sermons, translated by Robinson, vol. 2. serm. 2. The volume contains a series of excellent Discourses on the Evidences and the Doctrines of Christianity.

P. 171. l. 22. *we shall in vain lay down rules and maxims for the conduct of this inquiry, unless we admonish them of the dispositions with which it must be pursued.*] See a Sermon by Bp. Hurd, on the text, “*I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.*” Vol. 1. serm. 2.

P. 172. l. 1. *Blessed are the pure in heart.*] See another Sermon of Bp. Hurd’s, on 2 Cor. vii. 1. Vol. 2. serm. 19.

*Ibid.* l. ult. *Buy the Truth, and sell it not.*] See a Sermon on this text, by Saurin, vol. 1.

P. 173. l. 16. *How little there is in the world of this genuine love of Truth, is but too evident.*] “But,” says Bp. Sherlock, “whether you will consider it or no, yet there is such a call to you to consider it, as must render your neglect inexcusable. You cannot say, you want inducement to consider it, when you see it entertained by men of all degrees. The Gospel does not make so mean a figure in the world, as to justify your contempt of it: the Light shines forth in the world, whether you will receive

it or no; if you receive it not, the consequence is upon your own soul, and you must answer it. Were men sincere in their professions of Religion, or even in their desires of Salvation and Immortality, the controversies in Religion would soon take a new turn. The only question would be, whether the Gospel were true, or no: we should have no reasoning against Revelation in general; for 'tis impossible that a sincerely religious man should not wish for a Revelation of God's Will, if there be not one already. We should then see another kind of industry used in searching the truths of God, which are now overlooked, because men have lost their regard for the things which make for their Salvation. Were the Gospel but a title to an Estate, there is not an Infidel of them all who would sit down contented with his own general reasonings against it: it would then be thought worth looking into: it's profits would be considered, and a just weight allowed them. And yet the Gospel is our Title, our only Title, to a much nobler Inheritance than this world knows; 'tis the Patent by which we claim Life and Immortality, and all the joys and blessings of the heavenly Canaan." Vol. I. disc. 1. p. 31. "Tout ce qui demande de l'étude, demande plus ou moins d'attention, et l'attention, pour peu qu'elle coûte, suppose qu'on prend intérêt à ce qui l'occupe.—Si donc on ne regarde pas la connoissance de la vérité divine comme un bien réel, si d'avance on ne considère pas la découverte de la véritable Religion comme l'affaire la plus importante, la plus essentielle au bonheur d'une créature raisonnable, on ne se portera jamais à l'étudier avec l'empressement, ni à l'approfondir avec l'application convenable.—Mais est-ce de la sorte, que ceux, qui rejettent la Révélation, sont ordinairement disposés? Est-ce la vérité qu'ils aiment? Est-ce la vérité qu'ils cherchent?—Presque toutes leurs productions, à commencer par celle des *Celses*, des *Porphyres*, et des *Juliens*, et à finir par celles des plus hardis Déistes de nos jours, ne contiennent que des déclamations injurieuses à J. C. ou que de fades railleries contre ses ministres, ou que de mauvaises difficultés, dont une expression vive et brillante fait tout le prix. Tantôt, ils badinent, et tantôt, ils insultent. Ici, ils se prévaudront d'un mot échappé inconsidérément à un Théologien; là, ils rendront le Christianisme responsable de toutes les additions que la superstition y a faites: partout ils croiront triompher de l'Evangile, quand ils pourront reprocher quelque erreur ou quelque défaut à ceux qui l'annoncent. Etrange manière de montrer qu'on aime la vérité, et qu'on porte un cœur désireux de *connoître la crainte de l'Eternel*!

Sera-t-on surpris, que des gens de ce caractère demeurent dans l'incrédulité, quoique, d'ailleurs, avec des lumières et de l'esprit ? Il n'est pas naturel qu'on trouve ce qu'on ne cherche pas ; moins encore qu'on cherche, comme il faut, ce qu'on n'aime que peu, ou point." Sermons par C. Chais, à la Haye, 1790, tom. 2. serm. 3. *Sur les Dispositions qu'il faut apporter à l'Etude de la Religion.* See also two Discourses in the first vol. on the text, Heb. iii. 12. *Sur la Nature et la Source de l'Incrédulité.*

P. 173. l. 25. *Without that humility of mind which the Apostle inculcates.*] See Bp. Hurd's Sermons, vol. 1. serm. 12, 13. and vol. 2. serm. 4.

P. 177. l. 15. "*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" ] See a sermon on this text, by Dr. Horbery, entitled, *On the chief Causes of Scepticism in Matters of Religion.*

P. 182. l. 26. *Do we mean, in thus resting the truth of Revelation on it's external evidences, to exclude all endeavours to illustrate the internal evidence which it affords of the wisdom and goodness of God ?*] It having been suggested to me by a person of distinguished eminence in the Church, who has been pleased to honour this work with his particular attention, that by laying so great stress, as I have done, on the *external* proofs of Christianity, occasion might be given to the Adversary to reflect upon the Gospel, as incapable of being vindicated on the ground of it's *internal* excellence, I wish to take the opportunity, which is here presented, of explaining myself more particularly on this point.

The *internal evidence* of Revealed Religion, independently of it's external proofs, is undoubtedly very strong ; so strong, perhaps, as to satisfy every unprejudiced inquirer, that it must necessarily proceed from God. Contrast it, in this respect, with the dreary schemes of what is called Natural Religion, and it's superiority will be instantly manifest. It has indeed already been urged, (Lect. 14. p. 60—62.) that Natural Religion, as contradistinguished from Revealed, is unsuitable to the actual condition of Man ; that it makes no provision for his most pressing exigencies ; that it gives him neither clear and certain knowledge of his duty, nor ability to perform it ; that it affords him no claim of *reward* for his best services, nor any warrantable hope of escape from the *punishment* due to his misdeeds ; and, consequently, that, as a system, it is destitute of any solid foundation, and, even in what it professes to accomplish, falls far short of the object, which creatures, circumstanced as we are, must necessarily have

in view. On the other hand, the Christian Religion (judging of it merely from it's *internal* character) appears to be, in every respect, "*a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance*;" since it instructs us in every thing necessary for us to know, and assures us of sufficient help to perform whatever is required of us. It gives us ample information respecting the Divine Nature and Attributes, the Will of our Creator, the terms of our Acceptance with Him, the remedy provided for our corruption, the means of reconciliation, when we have offended him, the certain punishment that awaits impenitency and unbelief, and the blessed rewards that shall be bestowed on those who run with faith and patience the race that is set before them.

It is, I apprehend, in this entire and perfect adaptation of the Gospel to the general wants and exigencies of mankind, that the *internal evidence* of it's Divine original may properly be said to consist. For this evidence does not arise from it's being a system which, in all its particulars, can be explained, so as to be made consonant with man's notions of wisdom and expediency, (a kind of proof, which, considering the height, and depth, and magnitude of the subject, it were not reasonable to expect,) but it arises from the effectual provision which this Religion, and this only, has made, for all that human infirmity can want; from it's setting the mind at rest respecting those concerns which, of all others, press the most urgently upon our thoughts; from it's allaying our most painful disquietudes, satisfying our most anxious expectations, substantiating our most ardent hopes, banishing our most distressing fears, and obtaining for us what is emphatically called by the Apostle, "*that peace of God which passeth all understanding*," that which the human intellect could never have attained to by any investigations of it's own, and which, when attained to, leaves it nothing further to seek or to desire.

Nevertheless, admitting this argument in vindication of Christianity, to it's fullest extent, (and no one can be more sensible than I am of it's extreme importance,) it still appears to me, that the proof of it's *Divine Authority* depends *primarily* upon it's *external evidences*; since however well adapted the System itself unquestionably is, to the purpose for which it was designed, nothing could satisfy us that it really *came from God*, and was obligatory upon man as an *express Revelation of His Will*, but proofs of such an extraordinary nature as these external evidences convey. Indeed, most of those Writers who have engaged



in the proof of Christianity from the internal marks of it's Divine character, do yet acknowledge that external proofs were *also* necessary to give it the stamp of Divine Authority ; so that, after all, it seems generally agreed, that both the internal and external evidences should be brought in support of each other. The only question is, to which the *priority* is due ; or rather, which should form the *basis* of the argument ; a question, which appears to me, for the reasons already assigned, to admit of an easy solution. Nor can it justly be said, that by resting the proofs of Christianity, as a Divine Revelation, upon it's external evidences, we in any way diminish the value of it's intrinsic character : since it ought not to be doubted, that a system thus attested by the most convincing testimonies of it's Divine origin, must be such as will abide the most rigorous scrutiny as to it's internal evidences, provided that scrutiny be made with such deference to the Infinite Wisdom of it's Divine Author, as becomes man when he is permitted to *reason* with his Maker, and ventures to sit in judgment on the counsels of the Most High.

As this is a point of considerable importance, I am glad to strengthen what I have advanced, by the following highly respectable authorities.

" When we consider," says Bp. Sherlock, " the great and wonderful work of our Redemption, though we cannot account for every step of it to our own Reason and Understanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the effect of mere Will and arbitrary appointment, and void of all foundation in the Reason and Propriety of things. All the works of God are works of Wisdom ; and, as far as our capacities give us leave to judge, we discern evident marks of Wisdom in them all, and discover a fitness and propriety in every thing with respect to the end which it is intended to serve or promote. If this be so in every instance in which we are able to make any judgment, it is a great presumption that it is and must be so in all other instances, which are too high and great to be viewed and measured by human Understanding : and we have one positive argument that it is so, arising from the natural notion we have of God, and of his Attributes of Wisdom and Justice. It is impossible to suppose such a Being to do any thing by chance, or in compliance to mere will and humour. No : every act of God is the act of infinite Wisdom, and is founded in the necessary reason and propriety of things : and it is as true of the works of Grace, as it is of the works of Nature, that *in Wisdom he has ordained them all*. It is one thing not to be able to



discern the Reasons of Providence, and another to suppose there is no Reason in them." Vol. 1. disc. 2. p. 71. Again, " But that we may not mistake, and imagine that because this Mystery [viz. of *Redemption*] is said to be *made known* and *manifest* to us, therefore we are entitled to call for the Reasons upon which this wonderful administration of Providence is founded, it is necessary to observe, that the Gospel is a Revelation of the Will and Purpose of God. The Reasons upon which He acted, when He ordained this method of Salvation, are not fully revealed to us; nor have we authority to say they ever will be. Under the Law, we meet with many intimations of God's purpose to save mankind; under the Gospel, this purpose is opened and proclaimed to all the world: but neither under the Law, nor yet under the Gospel, are we instructed in the Reasons of this proceeding: but having Life and Immortality set before us in God's own way, we are left to embrace them through Faith, and confidence in His Promise, who is able to perform the word which is gone out of His mouth. And since God has thought fit to offer the Gospel as a matter of Faith to the world, and has given His word, confirmed by signs and wonders, as a sufficient security for the performance on His part, he acts without commission who proposes the Gospel to the world as a matter of Science and Knowledge, and the result of mere Reason, and pretends to account for the methods of God's Wisdom, which are far above and out of his sight." Ibid. vol. 4. disc. 2. p. 72. Thus far Bp. Sherlock, than whom no author, perhaps, has more ably and successfully vindicated Christianity on the ground of its internal evidence.

Bp. Hurd likewise, whose argumentative powers none will call in question, expresses himself in the following terms:—" The fundamental articles of the Gospel are proposed to us as objects of faith, not as subjects of inquiry. As they proceed from the source of light and truth, they are founded, no doubt, in the highest Reason; but they are for the most part, at least in many respects, inscrutable to *our* Reason. It is enough that we see cause to admit the Revelation itself, upon the evidences given of it; it is not necessary that we should carry our researches any farther. It is not safe, or decent, or practicable, in many cases, to do it. The just and sober reasoner is careful to proceed on clear and distinct ideas, and to stop where these fail him. But how soon does he arrive at this point! For the sublime genius of Christianity reminds him, at almost every step, how impossible it is, with the

scanty line of human Reason, to fathom *the deep things of God* ; and represses the sallies of his wit and fancy with this reflection—*how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !* In a word, where he finds the subject too obscure for his understanding to penetrate, or too vast for his ideas to comprehend, (and he presently finds this, when he attempts to reason on the mysteries of the Christian Faith,) he checks his inquiries, he believes, and adores in silence.” Vol. 2. serm. 4. p. 56.

One more extract from Mr. Morres’s Bampton Lectures (a work of great excellence) may suffice. “ After that it has been once fully and clearly ascertained by any kind of proof, that a system of doctrines must have been revealed by Almighty God, it may surely be judged unnecessary, in strictness of argument, to pursue an inquiry any farther. In such a predicament stands the question concerning the advantage to be derived from the Internal Evidence of the Gospel. Of whatever use this evidence may be, and it is, undoubtedly, of great importance, yet, if applied, singly or chiefly, to prove the truth of that dispensation, it is ill adapted to such a purpose, and never was designed to effect it. The accomplishment of Prophecy, and the achievement of Miracles, were the true criteria which our Lord brought forward against the Jews, and on which he rested his pretensions. The same attestations, when proved to have been recorded and communicated to us by credible witnesses, are the basis on which our Christian Faith now stands. Internal Evidence, therefore, is, in this regard, superfluous, and, if too much depended upon, would be a precarious and dangerous support. It follows, that great care is to be taken, with what views and intentions we set ourselves to read the matters contained in the Old and New Testament. It is to be constantly remembered, that we should not institute, primarily, an inquiry into their truth or falsehood, into their reasonableness or the contrary ; but rather, a research, so far as we are necessarily concerned, into their meaning and import. Absolute and palpable impossibility, or irreconcilable contradiction, would indeed distress us ; but with these we should recollect that we are morally certain not to meet ; and, we may add, no man of credit ever pretended to have detected such in them. While the only question then respects the appearances of these, concerning which different men from various causes hold different opinions, we are to remember that they are not matters that affect the admissibility of the Scriptures, and our submission by Faith and Obedience to that which is clearly

revealed. It would indeed be a mark of gross ignorance or negligence not to be aware, that in writings which treat of persons and things infinitely removed in nature, equally imperceptible by our senses and reflection, as also in a simple, concise, and irregular narrative of facts that commence with the creation of the world, there must be difficulties in many points: and therefore, if, when they occur, they sometimes surpass our ability to remove them, they can have no effect against our Belief. For, according to what has been said, some points may be inexplicable, because our limited nature is incapable of them; others, because we are not in possession of means whereby they might be investigated; and again, a third class may remain obscure, because it is the will and purpose of God that we should be imperfectly instructed in them. Upon the whole, a system perfectly and in all its parts clear of all difficulties, it would be contrary to reason and analogy to expect.—It is, therefore, I think, to be concluded, that, in strictness of reasoning, while there is not in Revelation any point, of which we are adequate to judge, that is plainly contradictory or impossible, all question relating to the perfect admissibility of the Old and New Testament is unjustifiable. If any man in the perusal of them thinks that he meets with a confirmation of his Faith from the nature of the matters contained, and especially from the goodness and wisdom of the moral doctrines, let him be thankful and happy. There are undoubtedly most numerous and important confirmations of this kind, the value of which it must be far from any one's wish to set aside or diminish. But let him remember that his Faith in, and submission to them, stands originally on another foundation, which cannot be shaken, the assurance already attained that these doctrines do really come from God. And therefore, though it is certain that nothing but what is good can come from such a Cause, yet it is of infinite consequence to him to consider that he is not an adequate judge of all that is good; that he is man, and not God; and therefore that he has no right to raise any doubt or difficulty in the way of his Faith because he is at any time unable to reconcile any matter to his notions of fitness and propriety: *that his Faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*" Sermon. 4. p. 79—83.

P. 183. l. 17. *the many clear and luminous expositions of its entire system, and the many admirable defences of its particular doctrines, which have been produced.*] See particularly, Smith's *Cure of Deism*; Skelton's *Deism Revealed*; Bp. Bradford's Boyle's Lect. *on the Credibility of*

*the Christian Revelation from it's intrinsic Evidences*; Turner's Boyle's Lect. *on the Wisdom of God in the Redemption of Man*; and Bp. Butler's masterly work *on the Analogy between Natural and Revealed Religion*.

P. 186. l. 16. *but is delivered in the plain authoritative mode of Instruction.*] See Dr. Patten's Sermon, already referred to, on 1 Pet. iii. 15, entitled, *The Christian Apology*; also his two Tracts in vindication of that Sermon against Dr. Heathcote, one entitled, *St. Peter's Christian Apology*, the other, *The sufficiency of the External Evidence of the Gospel*; and a subsequent Sermon *on the opposition between the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and what is called the Religion of Nature*. Text, Coloss. ii. 8. 4to. 1759.

### SERMON XIX.

P. 193. l. 6. *the simplest mode of proceeding will be, to trace the history of Christianity upwards, from the present time to the date of it's commencement.*] “If there was an age when the several persons mentioned in the New Testament did *pretend* to do what is there recorded of them, and all the *principal matters of fact* which make up the *Christian History* were believed far and wide, according to the relation there given, 'tis inconsistent with all the principles of *human nature*, and repugnant to the *nature of God*, that they should be false, as far as we are able, by all the knowledge we have of the *nature of God and Man*, to judge. That there was such an age as this, we have the *constant, universal, and uninterrupted Testimony* of all the succeeding Ages; and when a great many different countries and nations do all unanimously agree to assert, that their immediate Forefathers did receive such a *Religion*, consisting of a great variety of *Facts and Doctrines*; and all these being contained in certain books, and copies of these books being dispersed throughout these several countries, the *Faith* is every where the same:—in such a case as this, it is not to be doubted, but so far as the succeeding generation of men agree in their testimony concerning the Faith of their immediate Predecessors, so far they were of the same Faith with them. If this be not allowed, 'tis impossible to know any thing beyond our own time, and no *human testimony* is to be admitted upon any occasion; a greater and more unsuspected testimony than this being utterly inconceivable. But if such evidence as this be certain and unquestionable, as indeed it is, then is the *present universal belief of the Scriptures*



of the *New Testament* an undeniable argument that there was a time when the *principal matters of Fact* there recorded were *pretended* to be done, and were *believed* by vast multitudes of those who lived at that time to be really done, in the way and manner in which they are now related to have happened; and if they were then believed, they must be true." Bp. Gastrell's *Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. 8vo. 1699. p. 326.

P. 195. l. ult. *In the reign of Augustus Cæsar, a remarkable person, named JESUS, was born, &c.*] Respecting the character and ministry of our Blessed Lord, see Bp. Gastrell, as above, p. 19—42. Jenkin's Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. i. part 2. ch. 12—14. Abp. Newcome on our Lord's Conduct. Dr. T. Randolph's View of our Blessed Saviour's Ministry, 8vo. Oxf. 1784.

P. 197. l. 21. *the Apostles.*] See Bp. Gastrell, p. 42—50; and Dr. Jenkin, as above, vol. i. part 2. ch. 15, 16, 17.

P. 200. l. 8. *the Institution of the Christian Sacraments and the Christian Priesthood, &c.*] See Leslie's *Short Method with the Deists*, §. 3.

P. 201. l. 8. *Pagan Historians bear testimony likewise to some of the principal facts on which Christianity is founded.*] See Dr. Lardner's great work on the Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion.

Ibid. l. 18. *to compile a connected history of the establishment of Christianity, from hostile testimony alone.*] This has been done by the learned Professor Bullet, in his work already referred to, translated by Mr. Salisbury.

Ibid. l. 21. *It also appears that the writings of the New Testament were received as genuine, during the three first Centuries.*] The proofs of this are drawn out at length, in Dr. Paley's *Evidences*, ch. 9. sect. 3—10; also in Bp. Tomline's *Elements of Theology*, vol. i. part 2; and Bp. Gibson's *Third Pastoral Letter*.

P. 202. l. 7. *That these writings have come down to us in a sufficiently pure and unadulterated state.*] See the authors referred to in the preceding note, and also Jenkin's Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 2. ch. 4. The very great antiquity of *Manuscripts now existing* affords another argument for the genuineness and authenticity of the Sacred Writings, as they are to this day received in the Christian Church. "The principal Manuscripts are the Codex Alexandrinus, the Codex Cantabrigiensis, or the Codex Bezae, and the Codex Vaticanus. After a profound investigation of the subject, Dr. Woide fixes the age of the



*Codex Alexandrinus* between the middle and the end of the fourth century. After a similar investigation, Dr. Kipling fixes the age of the *Codex Cantabrigiensis*, or the *Codex Bezaë*, at the second century: but Mr. Herbert Marsh, in his notes to *Michaelis*, vol. 2. p. 708—715, seems to prove demonstratively, that it was not written beyond the fifth century. Montfaucon and Blanchini refer the *Codex Vaticanus* to the fifth century." Butler's *Horæ Biblicæ*, p. 120, 121.

P. 205. l. ult. *the nature of the facts clearly refutes the former supposition, and the nature of the institutions founded upon them as clearly refutes the latter.*] This argument, with it's application to both the Jewish and Christian Dispensations, is drawn out in the clearest and most satisfactory manner, by Leslie, in his *Short Method with the Deists*, and in his larger tract, *the Truth of Christianity demonstrated*. The argument is comprised in four short rules, which the author shews do all meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, and do not meet, nor can possibly meet, in any imposture whatsoever. The rules are these, "1st. That the matters of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it. 2. That it be done publicly in the face of the world. 3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions to be performed. 4. That such monuments, and such actions or observances, be instituted, and to commence from the time that the matter of fact was done." Mr. Jones, in his Preface to a new Edition of these Tracts by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, says, "in the former of these Tracts, the argument is so short and clear, that the meanest capacity may understand it, and so forcible, that no man has yet been found able to resist it. *When it was first published, some attempts were made, but they soon came to nothing.*" I am not aware, however, that any direct answer to these incomparable Treatises ever appeared. Mr. Jones relates, on the authority of the late Dr. Berkeley, son of the celebrated Bishop of Cloyne, that "Dr. Middleton, feeling how necessary it was to his principles, that he should some way rid himself of Mr. Leslie's argument, looked out for some false fact, to which the four marks might be applied; and that this he did for twenty years together, without being able to find one." Pref. p. vii. The substance of Leslie's argument, so far as it applies to *Moses*, with a variety of instances in illustration of it, may also be seen in Jenkin's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, vol. 1. part 2. ch. 6.

P. 206. l. 28. *The continuation of the Jewish History, through a space of more than a thousand years, is no less deserving of credit.*] Respecting the authority of the historical books of the Old Testament subsequent to the Pentateuch, see Gray's Key to the Old Testament, Bp. Tomline's Elements of Theology, vol. 1. ch. 2. and Jenkin, as above, vol. 1. part 2. ch. 7—10.

P. 208. l. 10. *For the further continuation of this history, &c.*] A succinct abridgement of the history of the Jews, from the close of the Scripture history to the destruction of Jerusalem, is given in Bp. Tomline's Elements of Theology, vol. 1. p. 215—231. For fuller information on the subject, see Dr. Prideaux's great work, the Connection of Sacred and Profane History.

Ibid. l. 26. *In the Book of Genesis is contained such a full, though concise, epitome of aboriginal history, as it seems impossible for any Impostor to have invented.*] Dr. Jenkin enumerates several remarkable passages in the Book of Genesis, in which reference is made to things that happened near the beginning of the world, as being well known in the time of Moses, and as having memorials of them then in existence, such as it is utterly improbable that any but a writer of true and genuine history would have ventured to appeal to. See vol. 1. part 1. ch. 1. *on the Antiquity of the Scriptures.*

P. 209. l. 15. *But where will they find, in profane writers, a history of the reputed father of a people attested like that of the Patriarch Abraham.*] The history of this Patriarch is most ably vindicated against the cavils of Voltaire, in the celebrated "*Lettres de quelques Juifs à M. de Voltaire.*" 3 toms. 8vo. Paris, 1781. tom. 2. p. 119—226.

P. 211. l. 1. *We have also such intimations given of the institution of Sacrifice, immediately after the Fall, as hardly leave us room to doubt that it was then ordained.*] Although there are no express declarations of the Divine institution of this Rite, yet the record of it's performance by Abel, and of it's acceptance on the part of the Deity, may be considered as a sufficient intimation that it originated in the Divine command. See the first of Dr. Gloucester Ridley's Sermons on the Christian Passover, (wherein the institution of Sacrifice is considered,) and Bp. Sherlock on Prophecy, disc. 3. p. 73.

P. 212. l. 1. *The very strong and remarkable testimony which is borne by Pagan antiquity to the leading circumstances of Jewish and Patriarchal history.*] See Stillingfleet's Orig. Sacr. b. 3. ch. 2, 4, 5; Gale's Court of the Gentiles, b. 3. ch. 3—6, 8; Faber's Horæ Mosaicæ, vol. 1. b. 18.

sect. 1. ch. 2—5; Maurice's *Indian Antiquities*, passim; Bp. Tomline's *Elements of Theology*, part 1. ch. 1.

P. 212. l. 22. *facts are of the nature of first principles.*] Some very just observations on the *Logic of Facts*, the *Principle of Facts*, *Reasoning in regard to Facts* and the *Truth of Facts*, may be seen in Dr. Tatham's Bampton Lect. vol. 1. ch. 9, where the subject is treated with much didactic precision. Any elaborate discussion, however, of so plain a subject might be deemed superfluous, were not the simple and almost self-evident principles on which our belief in matters of fact is founded, continually called in question, or at least virtually denied, by infidel Writers. Thus a much admired French Philosopher, in one of those mischievous little manuals of Infidelity which was circulated with the utmost industry by the leaders of the Anti-christian conspiracy on the Continent, arraigns, with the most ostentatious parade of close reasoning and argumentative subtilty, what he calls *factitious* religions, by which term he explains himself to mean all religions which profess to be established on *facts*, and therefore recognising (as he asserts) other principles than those of *nature* and of *reason*<sup>a</sup>; as if *facts* could ever, in any propriety of speech, be said to oppose *nature* and *reason*! He avers, moreover, that "*facts cannot be established with perfect certainty*; that the difference between *History* and *Fable* consists not in one being *true*, and the other *false*, but that one *may* be or has the *appearance* of being *true*, while the other is *surely* or *evidently false*; that to prove a fact incontrovertibly, *it must be impossible that men should lie or be deceived*; that facts therefore cannot be established beyond contradiction; that only *metaphysical* and *physical* truths are incontestable, and demand entire assent; and that therefore *metaphysical* truths must be consulted to attain to *absolute certainty*<sup>b</sup>." Now, to all this flimsy and ridiculous sophistry it is suffi-

a "J'appelle *Religions factices* toutes celles qui sont inventées par des hommes, qui sont établies sur des faits qui reconnoissent d'autres principes que ceux de la *nature* et de la *raison*, et d'autres loix que celles de la *conscience*."

b "Des faits ne peuvent être établis avec une parfaite certitude.—La différence entre l'Histoire et la Fable ne consiste pas en ce que l'une est vraie, et l'autre fausse. Elle est fondée sur ce que l'une peut être vraie, et qu'il y a même apparence qu'elle l'est, au moins en général, tandis que l'autre est sûrement ou évidemment fausse. Pour peu qu'un fait fût prouvé invinciblement, il faudroit qu'il fût impossible que les hommes mentissent aux autres, ou se trompassent eux-mêmes. On ne peut donc établir des faits de manière à les mettre à l'abri de toute contradiction. Il n'y a que les vérités métaphysiques et physiques qui soient incontestables, et qui arrachent un assentiment parfait et irrévocable. Il faut donc de nécessité consulter les vérités métaphysiques pour trouver une certitude absolue."



cient to reply, that *History is truth*, and *Fable is falsehood*, and the real difference between them is the same as that between true and false, whatever *appearance* there may be to the contrary, that facts *may* be certainly true, although it is possible that men *may* lie or be deceived; that therefore these *general* abstract positions signify nothing; the proper question being, are such and such *particular* facts true, or have such and such *particular* persons lied or been deceived? which question is capable of *moral*, though not of *physical* or *metaphysical* demonstration; physical and metaphysical truths not being proper criteria of *historical* facts, neither are they, in themselves, more incontestable or capable of absolute certainty. Agreeably, however, to this precious Philosophy, which is in direct opposition to the Common Sense of mankind, our Author boldly declares his intention to establish several incontestable truths, and to found a chain of reasoning upon them, which shall overturn all the phantoms of proofs alleged for *factitious* Religions; and he says expressly, “I will abstain always from entering on the discussion of facts, not only because it is a matter above my strength and that of most men, &c. but because Truth can never be discovered by that way<sup>c</sup>.” A very prudent resolution, certainly, for an Infidel writer to take. It involves, however, an implied concession of no small importance.—The reader, who may wish for a more full refutation of such philosophy, and a more particular illustration of the nature and foundations of human testimony, will find the subject treated with great acuteness by a *Christian* Philosopher of Geneva, Mr. Charles Bonnet, in his “*Philosophical and Critical Inquiries concerning Christianity*,” b. 2. ch. 1, 2, 3, 8. This Treatise, which is extracted from a larger work of the Author, was translated into English, by J. L. Boissier, Esq. 2nd Edit. 8vo. 1791.

P. 215. l. 10. *Infinite mischief has been done by what is affectedly called the Philosophy of History.*] Some very just observations on the light and superficial manner of composing history, first introduced by French writers, occur in Dr. Apthorp’s Letters on the prevalence of Christianity, letter 2. p. 13. Voltaire’s Treatise, entitled *la Philosophie de l’Histoire par feu M. l’Abbé Bazin*, is one of

c “Je fonderai sur ces vérités une chaîne de raisonnemens qui renverseront, je pense, tous les phantômes de preuves qu’allèguent les Religions factices, et qui en feront sentir l’inutilité et les inconvéniens; je m’abstiendrai toujours d’entrer dans la discussion des faits: outre que c’est une matière si fort au dessus de mes forces, et de celle de la plupart des hommes, que même les personnes les plus habiles ne peuvent la mettre hors de toute contestation. faute de monumens, on n’est jamais parvenu, et l’on ne parviendra jamais, à découvrir la vérité par cette voye.”

the most mischievous productions of it's kind, in which truth and falsehood, credulity and incredulity, are so blended together, as to require a considerable degree of diligence and research, to distinguish the one from the other. Over the whole is thrown a veil sometimes of philosophical profoundness, at other times of levity and *badinage*, well calculated to deceive a careless reader. This work of the fictitious Abbé was ably and fully exposed, in a small volume, entitled, *Supplément à la Philosophie d'Histoire de feu M. l'Abbé Bazin*. 8vo. Amsterdam, 1767. In the preface the Author observes, "C'est au mépris de la saine littérature que doivent leur existence ces prétendus beaux esprits, qu'on décore, je ne sais par quelle raison, du titre de Philosophes. Ceux à qui les Anciens donnoient ce nom, se distinguoient des autres hommes par leur piété, leur respect pour les loix, l'amour pour la patrie. Parmi nous c'est tout le contraire. Un ignorant, qui, par des raisonnemens captieux, attaque ce que la Religion a de plus respectable, l'existence de Dieu, l'immortalité de l'âme, principe de toutes nos vertus, source pure de notre joie dans la prospérité et de nos consolations dans l'adversité : cet ignorant nous l'appellons un Philosophe.—L'impiété n'avoit emprunté jusqu'à présent du secours que d'une vaine Philosophie ; elle n'avoit cherché à appuyer ses dogmes favoris que par de vains sophismes. Il étoit réservé à notre siècle de les voir prendre une autre route, plus détournée, il est vrai, mais qui ne tends pas moins au même but——Il s'est élevé un homme audacieux, pour qui rien n'est sacré, et qui toute sa vie s'est fait un plaisir de se jouer des plus grandes vérités ;—Après avoir épuisé dans son *Dictionnaire Philosophique* tous les sophismes que lui a pu suggérer une imagination dérégulée, il a voulu essayer dans un autre ouvrage les mêmes armes que les Bochart et les Huet avoient maniées avec tant d'avantage, je veux dire de *l'Erudition*. Peu fait pour une Science où l'Imagination n'a aucune part, et où il faut la remplacer par une vigueur de jugement peu commune, on le voit broncher à chaque pas. On croiroit du moins qu'avant d'entreprendre un pareil ouvrage, il a fait, à l'exemple des deux grands hommes que je viens de nommer, une étude sérieuse et approfondie des Langues savantes de l'Histoire, de la Chronologie, et principalement de la Critique. Mais au lieu de cela, on est surpris de ne trouver qu'une fastueuse ignorance, qu'à la faveur d'un style brillant, il est sûr de faire passer auprès de la multitude. Ne sachant aucune des Langues savantes, si l'on en excepte le Latin, ne connoissant point l'Histoire, ignorant jusqu'aux premiers principes de la Critique, il par-



court tous les monumens de l'antiquité. Aussi ne doit-on plus être étonné de lui voir entasser erreurs sur erreurs : mais on l'est toujours de ce que devant connoître ses forces, il a voulu écrire sur des sujets qui lui étoient entièrement étrangers." Pref. p. 31—35.

There are some admirable remarks on the character and writings of Voltaire, in a little piece by Bp. Horne, published in *The Scholar Armed*, vol. 2. p. 329, with a note subjoined by the Editor, Mr. Jones. Both these excellent men appear to have thoroughly understood Voltaire's character; of whom Mr. Jones remarks, that "he puts truth and error together, till the mind of an unlearned reader, having no touchstone, is confounded and believes nothing:" and Bp. Horne, in like manner, observes, that "his object is to be rid of truth, under the name of error; and to this all his artifices are directed." A multitude of errors and falsehoods in the *Philosophy of History*, and the *Philosophical Dictionary*, are also examined and refuted in a work by Dr. Findlay, entitled, "*A Vindication of the Sacred Books, and of Josephus, from various misrepresentations and cavils of the celebrated M. de Voltaire.*" Glasgow. 8vo. 1770. With such kind of Philosophy as Voltaire has introduced into the study of History, the reader will do well to compare what is said in Dr. Tatham's Bampton Lect. b. 1. ch. 10, which treats of the Historical *Principle*, Historical *Reasoning*, and Historical *Truth*. But the French Philosopher has a much readier way of deciding on such matters. *No such things happen in our time, therefore they never happened*, seems to be esteemed excellent reasoning by Voltaire, Frederic, and their associates. A most notable syllogism !

P. 217. l. 1. *The foundation of our reliance on Testimony lies in the very nature and constitution of man.*] See Beattie's Essay on Truth, part 1. ch. 2. sect. 8; Jenkin's Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 1. part 4. ch. 2; Tatham's Bampton Lect. as above; Bonnet's Philosophical and Critical Inquiries, b. 2. ch. 1, 2, 3, 8; Bp. Gastrell's Certainty of the Christian Revelation, p. 342.

Ibid. l. 24. *his objections are founded on mere suspicion.*] On the sin and folly of suffering bare *suspicion* to outweigh positive *testimony* of a fact, see some forcible remarks in Bp. Gastrell's work, as above, p. 352.

P. 218. l. 16. *what is it that ever gives just grounds of suspicion concerning human testimony?*] See Bp. Stillingfleet's Letter to a Deist, an excellent little Tract, which has been since republished at Oxford, in the *Enchiridion*

Theologium, and also in a small collection of Tracts published by the Rev. Duke Young, 12mo.

P. 219. l. 20. *But, says the Unbeliever, &c.*] This and the following objections are taken, almost literally, from one of the most popular works of a French infidel writer, on which some remarks have already been made in the note on p. 255. l. 4. The particular objection here stated, is met in it's full force, and effectually refuted, by Bp. Sherlock, in a Sermon on John xx. 30, 31. vol. 1. disc. ix. also in vol. 1. disc. 1. p. 29—31.

P. 222. l. 15. *what foundation has the ancient Heathen Mythology?*] Leslie observes, of the fables of the heathen gods, of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupiter's turning himself into a bull, and the like, that, besides the folly and unworthiness of such senseless pretended miracles, "the wise among the heathen did reckon no otherwise of these than as fables, which had a mythology or mystical meaning in them, of which several of them have given us the rationale or explication. And it is plain enough that Ovid meant no other by all his Metamorphoses. It is true, (he adds,) the heathen Deities had their priests: they had likewise feasts, games, and other public institutions in memory of them. But all these want the *fourth mark*, viz. that such priesthood and institutions should commence from the time that such things as they commemorate were said to be done; otherwise they cannot secure after ages from the imposture, by detecting it at the time when first invented. But the Bacchanalia, and other heathen feasts, were instituted many ages after what was reported of these gods was said to be done, and therefore can be no proof. And the Priests of Bacchus, Apollo, &c. were not ordained by these supposed gods; but were appointed by others, in after ages, only in honour to them. And therefore these orders of priests are no evidence to the matters of fact which are reported of their gods." *Short Method with the Deists.* See his Works, vol. 1. p. 18; also Jenkin's Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 1. part 3. ch. 2, 3.

P. 223. l. 11. *Compare again the Religion of Mahomet with that of Jesus or of Moses.*] "The matters of fact of Mahomet," says Leslie, "do all want some of the four rules, whereby the certainty of matters of fact is demonstrated. First, for Mahomet, he pretended to no Miracles, as he tells us in his Alcoran, c. 6, &c.; and those which are commonly told of him pass among the Mahometans themselves but as legendary fables; and as such are rejected by the wise and

learned among them ; as the legends of their saints are in the Church of Rome. But, in the next place, those which are told of him do all want the two first rules before mentioned, viz. that they be such as men's outward senses may judge of, and that they be done publicly in the face of the world. For his pretended converse with the moon; his mersa, or night-journey, from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c. were not performed before any body. We have only his own word for them. And they are as groundless as the delusions of Fox or Muggleton among ourselves." *Short Method*, as above, p. 18. See also Jenkin, as above, vol. 1. part 3. ch. 6, 7.

## SERMON XX.

P. 227. l. 1. *that for our confirmation in the Christian Faith, we have Divine as well as human testimony.*] "There is in this case," says Bp. Pearson, "*a double Testimony*: the Testimony of man to man, relying upon human authority; and the Testimony of God to man, founded upon Divine authority: which two kinds of Testimony are respective grounds of two kinds of *Credibility*, *human* and *Divine*; and consequently there is a twofold *Faith*, distinguished by this double object, a *human* and a *Divine Faith*. *Human Faith* is an assent unto any thing credible, merely upon the testimony of man. Such is the belief we have of the words and affections one of another: and upon this kind of faith we proceed in the ordinary affairs of our life: according to the opinion we have of the ability and fidelity of him which relates or asserts any thing we believe or disbelieve. Seeing then our *Belief* relies upon the ability and integrity of the relater, and seeing the knowledge of all men is imperfect, and the hearts of all men are deceitful, and so their integrity to be suspected, there can be no infallible universal ground of our *human Faith*. But, what we cannot find in the testimony of man, we may be satisfied in the testimony of God. *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.* Yea, *let God be true*, the ground of our *Divine*, and every man a liar, the ground of our *human Faith*.—*Divine Faith* is an assent unto something as credible, upon the Testimony of God. This Assent is the highest kind of *Faith*, because the object hath the highest credibility, because grounded upon the testimony of God, which is infallible.—For, first, God is of infinite knowledge and wisdom.—Secondly, the justice of God is equal to his knowledge; nor is his holiness inferior to his wisdom. It is therefore most infallibly certain, that God being in-

finitely wise, cannot be deceived : being infinitely good, cannot deceive : and upon these two immoveable pillars standeth the authority of the *Testimony* of God.—Whosoever thinketh any thing comes from Him, and assenteth not unto it, must necessarily deny Him to be wise or holy : *he that believeth not God*, saith the Apostle, *hath made him a liar*. That truth, then, which is testified by God, hath a *Divine Credibility* : and an *Assent* unto it, as so *credible*, is Divine Faith : in which the material object is the Doctrine which God delivereth, the formal object is that Credibility founded on the *Authority* of the deliverer. And this I conceive the true nature of *Divine Faith* in general.” Pearson on the Creed, Art. I. p. 4—7. edit. 2. 1662.

P. 231. l. 7. *The advocates for Natural Religion may speculate as they please upon the efficacy of any Atonement, &c.*] The presumptuous notions of the Deists respecting the efficacy of Repentance without any Atonement for Sin, and their fallacious representations of the Divine Goodness, which they maintain to be a sufficient ground for our hope of acceptance, notwithstanding all our demerits and defects, are exceedingly well exposed and refuted in Smith’s *Cure of Deism*, vol. 1. ch. 10. p. 271—298. The same subject is also ably treated in Dr. Turner’s *Boyle’s Lect. on the Wisdom of God in the Redemption of Man*, Sermon 2, 3, 4 ; and in Bp. Butler’s *Analogy*, part 2. ch. 5. *on the Appointment of a Mediator, and the Redemption of the world by Him* ; in which the system of Christianity, in this particular, is vindicated against the cavils of Unbelievers.

P. 232. l. 6. *something entirely out of the common course of human invention.*] “I can no more believe,” says Bp. Gastrell, “the whole Christian scheme an imposture of mere human contrivance, than I can believe that all the materials which composed the city of *Rome* met together, and put themselves into that form. For, as I cannot see what should give those materials a determinate motion towards the building that city ; no more can I comprehend what should influence or determine a man to frame and contrive such a *history* and *religion* as the *Christian*. And as ’tis impossible to believe that, if all the materials necessary for the building of *Rome* had, by some extraordinary motion, been carried to that place, they would have fashioned themselves, and fell into that exact form we find that city built in ; so likewise is it equally impossible to conceive, that if there was any *end* or *motive* in nature sufficient to determine a man to *invent* such a *Religion* as the *Christian*, he should have made and contrived it, in all it’s parts and circumstances, just such as it is delivered



to us in the *Scriptures*: and that, so contrived, it should have been *entertained, propagated, and fixed* in the world, upon lasting foundations. Now, the reason why I conclude both these things equally impossible, is, because there never was any thing like either of these events ever known to have happened in the world; and because upon the utmost stretch of thought, grounded upon the most intimate knowledge we can have of the *nature* of the *things* concerned, and the greatest compass of *observation* that can be made upon the course of things in the world, it cannot be conceived or imagined that such events as these should ever happen." *Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, p. 333.

P. 232. l. 16. *This argument for the Divine origin of the Christian scheme.*] "When we see a plan so far beyond the compass of human genius to comprehend as that we have been reviewing, described by the joint assistance of men in every circumstance so distinguished; and this executed with the same consistency and uniformity as if it had been the regular work of some great and single genius; what can we conclude but that the Spirit of Divine Wisdom presided over the whole work, assigning each his part, and so conducting him through it, that this universal harmony might still be preserved?—Could human contrivance give rise, or human power success, to a scheme of these dimensions? Mark it's increase and extent, how steadily it advances, how it breaks through all interruptions, and overbears all resistance, how regular it's progress, how deep laid it's foundations, how awful it's magnitude: and then ask, if such be the result of human foresight, and human abilities; ask if that subtilty, whose most contiguous designs are very superficial and uncertain, could work at such a distance so deeply and so surely; if that power, which finds itself counteracted and circumscribed by every being with which it is surrounded, could give birth to such amazing operations; ask, in short, if *threescore years and ten* could expand itself till it became commensurate with four thousand years.—To comprehend all at once. Could we suppose all possible advantages of power and genius on one side, opposed to all the disadvantages of ignorance and impotence on the other; yet even thus, where all the fit engines of imposture work under a covert so favourable to delusion, they could not establish such an imposture as this. Let all human abilities be accumulated in the actors, and the witnesses loaded with all human weakness and defects; let a vein of craft and a vein of credulity run parallel to each other through the antediluvian, the patriarchal, the Mosai-



cal, the prophetical, and apostolical ages; yet still the harmony, that appears throughout the plan of Revelation, is of such a nature, as makes it absolutely impossible to be the product of humanity thus luckily circumstanced. For except the aggregate of human power could rise at last to omnipotence, and the sum of human knowledge could amount to prescience, they could never have done more than to take all advantages of present occurrences; they could never have contrived or conducted a scheme, whose success depended on events situated in remotest futurity; which was so surprisingly accommodated to every change of circumstances that should arise in succeeding times; in whose beginning might be seen, as it were, the rudiments and seeds of it's perfection; and whose accomplishment was a wonderful realizing of events imaged in it's state of immaturity. Such a scheme could have been carried into execution by none but HIM, "who declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." It could be planned by no wisdom but that, which reacheth from one end to the other mightily, and doth sweetly order all things."—Rotheram's *Sketch of the one great argument for the Truth of Christianity*, p. 30, 41, 51. This excellent Tract was printed at Oxford, 8vo. 1754. For a more copious illustration of this subject, see Dr. Berriman's *Boyle's Lect. on the gradual Revelation of the Gospel*; and Mr. Archdeacon Daubeny's valuable Discourses *on the Connection between the Old and New Testament, considered as parts of the same Divine Revelation*, 8vo. 1802.

P. 242. l. 11. *In the case of Moses, this has been very convincingly proved.*] Besides the masterly performance of Mr. Bryant here referred to, an excellent compendium of the arguments for the Divine mission of Moses, may be found in Mr. Hare's *Essay on Scepticism*, chap. 8. This valuable little work was printed at Oxford, 12mo. 1801.

Ibid. l. ult. *By a similar mode of argument, the history of our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles has been often shewn to afford incontrovertible proofs of Divine agency.*] See Bp. Gastrell's *Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, p. 195—222. Bp. Jeremy Taylor's *Moral Demonstration that the Religion of Jesus Christ is from God*, sect. 22—26. This is taken from his great work, *Ductor Dubitantium*, and is reprinted in *The Scholar Armed*, vol. 2. p. 353. See also Bp. Porteus's *Summary of the Evidences of the Christian Religion*, prop. 7. and Dr. Jortin's *Discourses on the Truth of the Christian Religion*, disc. 2.

P. 247. l. 24. *That the time, in which the Redemption of mankind received it's completion in the person of our blessed Saviour, was precisely that which was most evidently calculated to produce it's intended effect.*] Dr. Marshall, in an excellent Sermon on Gal. iv. 4, remarks, "that if our Saviour had been sent among us long *before*, or long *after*, the days of *Augustus Cæsar*, one of these two inconveniences must have ensued upon his *earlier* or *later* appearance, viz. that the *earlier* would have left us no sufficient conviction, that we could not have found the true God without him; since, after so much experience of our own weakness and disability, we are scarce even *now* prevailed with to acknowledge the necessity of a Divine Revelation for teaching us the will of God. On the other hand, a *later* appearance would not have found mankind in so good a preparation to discuss the credentials of our Saviour's commission, nor to examine the truth and authority of his powers: had it been delayed for five hundred years longer, by that time we know there was a relapse into the old state of blindness; and the charge of imposture would have sounded more plausible, when so few were judges, or knew how to distinguish a *counterfeit* from a *just* pretension." Vol. 1. Sermon. 5. p. 113. Mr. Rotheram, also, in the Tract above quoted, observes, "Providence co-operating with natural causes, in determining the time of our Saviour's coming, would have a regard to that season, when the circumstances and disposition of mankind were such as might make way for it's speedy propagation and establishment. That the most extensive monarchy then subsisted, and that the minds of men, much improved by learning, were prepared for the reception of truth, may reasonably be esteemed circumstances of this kind. By the former of these a communication being opened between most of the nations of the known world, the progress of the Gospel must have been greatly facilitated; and if by the latter it was subjected to all the rude handling of a sceptical examination, yet this helped to bring it forth into that full light where it was most for its advantage to appear. Besides these and several other considerations which might be added for the satisfaction of that inquiry, why the Messiah was not sent into the world to save mankind much earlier; and besides that the delay can be thought no loss to any age, since those who went before were saved by faith in the promise; we may add, that the Gospel could not have been advanced much higher into antiquity, without shortening the chain, and, consequently, lessening the force of evidence." *Sketch of the one*

*great Argument for Christianity*, p. 56. The same point has been very successfully handled by most of our eminent Divines. Among many others that might be mentioned, see Jortin on the Truth of the Christian Religion, disc. 4. Hall's Bampton Lect. entirely on this subject; Bp. Bagot's Warb. Lect. disc. 3, 6, 7. Nares's Warb. Lect. Sermon. 9. Felton's L. M. Lect. pref. p. 79—86.

P. 250. l. 22. *this success of the Gospel, wonderful and inexplicable as it is by any human means, &c.*] The argument drawn from the wonderful Propagation of the Gospel has been urged with great effect, by almost every Writer who has engaged in the vindication of Christianity. It may be seen, comprised within a short compass, in Bp. Taylor's Demonstration of Christianity, above referred to; also in Bp. Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacrae*, b. 2. ch. 9. §. 20—24; Bp. Gastrell's Certainty of the Christian Revelation; Jortin's Discourses on the Christian Religion, disc. 2; Dr. Powell's Sermons, 10, 11; and Mr. Kett's Bampton Lect. Sermon. 2, 3, 4, 5, in which Mr. Gibbon's attempt to account for the success of Christianity by merely human causes, is examined and refuted. Great pains have indeed been taken by this acute and insidious Adversary of our Faith, to deprive us of this powerful argument, by assigning certain *secondary* causes, which may sufficiently account for the success of Christianity without supposing any extraordinary interposition of Divine Providence. The zeal of the primitive Christians against Idolatry;—their doctrine of a Future State, and of the approaching end of the world;—the miraculous powers ascribed (though, as this Author would fain insinuate, undeservedly) to the Apostles and their successors;—the virtues (or rather, as he represents them, the spurious and false virtues) of the first professors of the Faith:—and lastly, the close union which subsisted among them, an union, as it is described by this Author, somewhat like an artful and guilty confederacy against the rest of mankind;—these are the causes to which Mr. G. would solely, or principally, ascribe the rapid success of the Gospel. But it is no difficult task to point out the inadequacy of any, or all, of these to the effect produced, without the especial co-operation of more than *human* power. The *virtues* of the primitive Christians; their zeal against *idolatry*; and their mutual affection and *union*, founded on the basis of that Faith which “worketh by love;” were indeed distinguishing characteristics of the disciples of Christ. But these they exerted in direct opposition to the tempers and dispositions, the habits, the prejudices, and the corrupt interests



of most of those to whom they preached; and by these they were continually subjected to obloquy and persecution. That these efforts ultimately prevailed over the stubborn passions of mankind, is unquestionable; but their obvious tendency was to provoke, in the first instance, the jealousy and hatred of a corrupt world, rather than to conciliate it's favour. Besides, *whence* did these preachers themselves derive that zeal and those extraordinary virtues, by means of which "the word of God grew so mightily and prevailed?" And *who* endued these rude, unlettered men, with such knowledge and such excellence, as enabled them thus to "shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation?"—Again, the doctrine of a *Future State*, as taught by *Christian* Preachers, was little suited to the taste of a misguided world, sunk in sensuality, and debased by the gross superstitions of Heathen Mythology. In itself it was, indeed, when firmly believed, the most powerful motive that could be offered to arouse mankind from sin to holiness; but, if unaccompanied with the tokens of *Divine* authority, it could hardly have obtained acceptance, to the exclusion of notions already current, which were far more acceptable to the prevalent corruption of sentiment among mankind. Neither is it reasonable to suppose, that the doctrine of *the approaching end of the world* (which, however, was certainly *not* taught, as Mr. G. represents it, by the primitive Christians) would have made many proselytes, had there not been some *previous* evidences of an irresistible nature, that those who preached it, had indeed a *Divine* commission. As to the *miraculous* powers exercised by the Apostles and their successors, we readily acknowledge *their* influence in producing the effects described. But the miracles said to have been wrought by them, if *true*, must be resolved into *Divine* agency: if *false*, why should they produce greater effect than the spurious and lying wonders of the Heathen themselves? Thus, in every point of view, the sophistical reasoning of Mr. Gibbon is apparent, and the misapplication of his ingenuity only serves to shew the weakness of the cause which he has endeavoured to support.

## SERMON XXI.

P. 256. l. 28. *That Miracles being contrary to general experience are incapable of proof, and being likewise contrary to the established laws of Nature, imply in the very character of them a palpable contradiction.*] Dr. Ogden, in his Ser-

mon on the Resurrection of Christ, thus happily exposes the absurdity of Hume's reasoning on this subject:—"The Resurrection, it seems, was an event so strange, that no testimony whatever is enough to prove it: the story, we may be sure, is not true, whoever he be that tells it. On what foundation, pray, do you build an assurance so very absolute?—On the foundation of experience.—As how?—I am to tell you, then, that we know nothing of the essence of *causality*, but found all our assent upon *similitude*.—I am not sure that I comprehend you.—You cannot be in possession of so fine an argument in perfection, without having recourse to the original inventor: it may suffice to let you know in brief, that we believe always what is most *likely*, and call that most likely, which most resembles what we have before met with.—But things often fall out that were not likely.—Yes, so often, that we find it, in general, likely that they should: and in each particular case reflect which of the two is less likely, that the thing should be as it is represented, or the reporter represent it falsely.—Have you ever found, in the course of your experience, that any thing was not true, which had been as well attested as the Resurrection?—It was a miracle: experience therefore, universal experience, declares against it.—That of the *five hundred brethren* who saw it, was, sure, on the other side.—You must appeal to present experience. Nature we find unchangeable.—Nature! when I dispute with you about Christianity, I suppose that you believe a God.—You suppose, perhaps, too fast.—Then I have no further dispute with you. I leave you to other hands. Christianity desires no greater honour, than to be received by every one that is not an atheist." Vol. 1. Sermon. 5. *on the Articles of Faith*, p. 181.

P. 259. l. 5. *It is arguing upon a supposition, wholly incapable of proof, that the course of Nature is indeed so unalterably fixed, that even God himself, by whom it's laws were ordained, cannot, when he sees fit, suspend their operation.*] "If," says that great philosopher, Mr. Boyle, "we consider God as the Author of the Universe, and the Establisher of the Laws of Motion, whose concurrence is necessary to preserve the effect of every particular physical agent, we must acknowledge, that when he withholds his concurrence, or changes those Laws of Motion, which depend upon his Will, all the axioms and theorems of Natural Philosophy must be invalidated; these supposing the established Laws of Motion amongst the parts of the Universe, upon which all the *phenomena* of Nature depended. It is a rule in Natural Philosophy, *causæ necessariae semper*



*agunt quantum possunt* ; but it follows not thence, that fire must burn Daniel's three companions, or their clothes, when cast into the fiery furnace, when God Almighty withdrew his concurrence to the operation of the flames, or supernaturally defended their bodies. Philosophers have always taught, that when men are dead, they cannot be brought to life again ; which, though true according to the course of Nature, yet God may reunite the soul to the body, if the organization be not too much vitiated, or he may so alter the fabric of the body as to make it fit to exercise the function of the body : and though *miraculous* effects are not to be attributed to *physical* agents, yet we may believe the same things when ascribed to God, or agents assisted by his *supernatural* power. That a man born blind should recover his sight by the application of clay and spittle, is incredible if done by man ; but we may believe that the Son of God was able to perform it : and the like may be said of all those Miracles done by the assistance of Divine power. For it argues not our belief irrational, because such things could not be done according to the course of Nature, but they must be proved either impossible to the power of God, or that the records we have of them are not sufficient testimonies." Theolog. Works epitomized, vol. 1. p. 382. *on the Reconcilableness of Reason and Religion.*

P. 262. l. 14. *But, says another Sophist, God is the Author of the laws of Nature ; so that whatever opposes those laws, is necessarily repugnant to the Divine Nature.* [ " Sub-jicit, [sc. Spinoza, in Tractatu Theol. polit. p. 69.] *Si quid igitur in naturâ contingeret, quod ejus universalibus legibus repugnaret, id decreto et intellectui et naturæ divinæ etiam necessariò repugnaret.* Negavimus ejusmodi leges naturæ universales et immutabiles : Adversarius non probavit eas dari. Sed attende, quæso. Inter naturæ leges universales est, quòd corpora gravia deorsùm moveantur. Ea lex si immutabilis planè foret, adeò ut nunquam interrumpi posset, nunquam fieri posset ut corpora gravia sursùm moverentur : quod tamen homo, ea sursùm projiciendo facillè efficere potest. Quemadmodum igitur homo naturæ leges universales interrumpere potest, ita Deus, qui naturæ leges fixit, eas quandocunque vult ad tempus inhibere potest. Sed Adversarius fortè responderit, etiam hanc naturæ legem esse, ut corpora gravia, vi externâ accedente, contra suam naturam moveantur. Sed simul ei fatendum est, idem semper responderi posse, quando aliquid vel contra vel supra naturam (quæ pro eodem haberi vult) accidit. Nihil igitur repugnat naturæ divinæ, quòd interdum con-

tra naturæ leges faciat. Quare frustrà addit : *aut si quis statueret Deum aliquid contra leges Naturæ agere, is simul etiam cogeretur statuere, Deum contra suam naturam agere.* Si natura Deus est, benè procedit argumentum : sed si Deus naturæ author et rector est, pessimè. Cùm igitur negamus naturam esse Deum, negamus etiam, Deum, qui naturæ est author et gubernator, contra naturam suam aliquid agere, quando ejus ordinarium cursum interrumpit ad breve tempus, ut ipse aliquod extraordinarium opus, quod natura ordinario suo cursu efficere nequit, producat. Æquivocè dici potest, Deum contra suam naturam, id est contra Universum hoc (quod suum, id est Dei est) quod creavit et regit, facere, quando miracula edit. At verò in tam arduo negotio non oportet ludere. Agimus de divinæ essentiæ naturâ, id est de naturâ Naturæ conditoris. Quem quamvis Adversarius non agnoscit, debet tamen, si seriò disputare velit, ambiguitatem quantum potest vitare, quam quantum potest sectatur." Cuperi Arcana Atheismi, l. 1. cap. 6. p. 56.

P. 263. l. ult. "*It is impossible,*" says an Oracle among modern Unbelievers, &c.] A similar argument is thus urged by Spinoza, from whom it was, no doubt, borrowed by Voltaire :—" *Aliàs enim quid statuitur, quàm quod Deus Naturam adeò impotentem creaverit, ejusque leges et regulas adeò steriles statuerit, ut sæpe de novo ei subvenire cogatur, si eam conservatam vult ?*" To which his acute antagonist thus replies :—" Quis est iste Deus ? cùm nullum Deum præter Naturam agnoscat Adversarius. Si Deus Naturam creavit, non omnipotentem creare potuit, sed finitam ei potentiam indere debuit, ut Naturæ Dominus manere posset : quod non posset, si (quod impossibile est) infinitam ei potentiam indidisset. Ipse Adversarius negat miracula posse fieri, ergo Naturæ potentiam non infinitam esse concedit. Ut enim miracula fiant, contradictionem minimè implicat. *Ejusque leges et regulas adeò steriles constituerit, &c.* Nullo modo id statuitur, quando Naturæ potentiam finitam esse statuimus : injuriam nobis, istud affigendo, facit. Miracula enim non ad Naturæ conservationem, sed ad supranaturalium fidem adstruendam adhiberi credimus." Arcan. Ath. ut suprâ, p. 58. The same argument is noticed and refuted, in a short tract written against Spinoza, and entitled, *Vindiciæ Miraculorum*, auctore Jac. Batalerio, 24mo. Amst. 1673 ; and also by Buddeus, in his work, *de Atheismo et Superstitione*, cap. 3. §. 5. and cap. 7. §. 5.

P. 264. l. 3. *He would not derange the machine of his own construction, &c.]* To obviate objections of this kind,

it has sometimes been argued, that the Creator, foreseeing the necessity of Miracles for certain moral purposes, might so preordain the course of Nature, as that they should come to pass without a violation or derangement of any physical laws. This argument is used by M. Bonnet, in his *Philosophical and Critical Inquiries concerning Christianity*, b. 2. ch. 4. But the hypothesis (as his Translator justly remarks) may be thought too abstruse and refined; and certainly it is not necessary for the refutation of the objection alleged. It is, however, of old date, Maimonides having made use of it, in vindication of the Miracles of the Old Testament, as appears from the following remark of the learned Fabricius: “*Moses Maimonides in More Nevochim, l. 2. c. 35. ubi de miraculis Mosis et Prophetarum, et ad Codicem Talmudicum, Capitula Patrum, t. 4. Misnæ edit. Surenhusianæ, p. 469. ubi putat DEUM jam in ipsâ creatione statim rebus indidisse virtutem eorum, quæ olim fieri debent, miraculorum: quod tamen minimè est necesse vel congruens, si DEUM providere adhuc rebus humanis, atque, ut testatur Christus, Joh. v. 17. usque etiamnùm operari cogitemus.*” Fabricii de ver. Chr. Rel. c. 43. p. 696. As an argument *ad hominem*, this reasoning may, however, be sometimes advantageously employed; and, as such, it is used with good effect in refutation of Spinoza’s sophistry, by the Abbé Houtteville, in his work, entitled, *La Religion Chrétienne prouvée par les Faits*, l. 1. ch. 6.

P. 267. l. 16. *Against the possibility of their being wrought by any thing less than Divine power.*] This point is thus argued by the learned Philosopher and Theologian, J. F. Buddeus: “Per miraculum, si propriè et accuratè loqui velimus, nihil aliud intelligi potest, quàm ejusmodi operatio, quâ reverà naturæ leges, quibus totius hujus universi ordo et conservatio innititur, suspenduntur. Quemadmodum igitur solus Deus, tanquam naturæ auctor, istas naturæ leges constituit; ita solus etiam eas suspendere, adeoque et solus miracula edere potest. Perinde autem est, sive immediatè hoc Deus faciat, sive mediatè per alios homines. Moses namque aliique prophetæ, qui miracula ediderunt, non ex suâ potentiâ, sed ex facultate à Deo illis concessâ, hoc fecerunt. Qui ergo miracula admittit, Deum quoque eorum auctorem admittit, necesse est.—Si porro excipias, potuisse tamen Deum ejusmodi facultatem angelis concedere, æquè ac eam quandoque hominibus concessit, nihil tamen obtines. Tum enim angeli non propriâ, sed alienâ virtute, hoc est Dei, talia perpetrant; adeoque firma manet assertio, miracula perpetrare solius Dei est. Deinde



probandum erit, Deum hanc facultatem angelis aliquando concessisse. Quamdiu dissentientes hoc firmiter solidèque non demonstrant, tamdiu credendum, ipsum Deum absque ministerio angeli miraculum perpetrâsse. Accedit, quòd si aliquid hâc exceptione obtinere vellent, statuendum illis esse, angelis malis etiam hanc facultatem esse concessam. Quod cùm directè cum bonitate, sapientiâ, et justitiâ Dei pugnet, ne dignum quidem est, ejus refutationi immoremur." *De Atheismo et Superstitione*, cap. 3. §. 5. p. 289.

P. 270. l. 1. *If, however, we should incline to the opinion, that in some few instances, God might permit Evil Spirits to perform certain strange things exceeding the natural powers of mankind.]* The general question respecting the evidence of the truth of Christianity from Miracles is largely discussed in Bp. Stillingfleet's *Origines Sacræ*, b. 2. ch. 9, 10, where he clearly proves, that God alone can really alter the course of nature; that God never alters the course of nature, but for some very considerable end; and that in the case of our Blessed Saviour there were manifest proofs of this Divine power, operating for great and most important purposes, such as are not to be found in support of any imposture or counterfeit Religion whatsoever. He also points out the difference between true and false Miracles, and the rules by which we may certainly distinguish those which are Divine from delusions of the senses, or diabolical impostures; proving it to be the invariable character of Divine Miracles, that they are wrought to confirm some Divine Testimony; that they are never contrary to that Divine Testimony which is already confirmed by Miracles: that they are accompanied with Divine effects on those who believe them; that they tend to the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan; that they may be known and distinguished from false or diabolical, by the circumstances or manner of their operation; and that, in case of any competition between them and others, God makes it evident that the things done by Him exceed all created power; observing, on this last head, "that though *impostures* and *delusions* may go far, and the power of *Magicians* farther, when God permits them, yet when God works Miracles to confirm a Divine Testimony, he makes it evident that His power doth infinitely exceed them all; as was conspicuous in the case of Moses and our Blessed Saviour."

P. 270. l. 25. *As to the histories in the Old and New Testament, respecting Sorcerers and wonder-working Deceivers.]* The reader who is desirous of entering into a particular consideration of these passages of Scripture,

may obtain much valuable information from consulting the following authors : Bp. Stillingfleet, as above ; Bp. Fleetwood's Essay on Miracles, p. 9—44, and p. 90—120 ; Le Moine's Treatise on Miracles, p. 139—215 ; Serceez sur les Miracles, art. 5 ; Werenfelsii Opuscula Theologica, diss. 5, *solutio quæstionis, num miracula certa sint veritatis signa ?* It will be seen, by comparing these and other works which might be referred to, that various hypotheses have been framed by able Divines, for the vindication of these passages of Holy Writ against the cavils and misrepresentations of infidel writers.

P. 271. l. 5. *The Almighty operating, even through the medium of evil agents, &c.]* This is the ground on which Bp. Fleetwood undertakes to vindicate the account of the Egyptian Magicians who withstood Moses, and of other similar occurrences in Scripture. He maintains, in the first place, “ that the Devil himself cannot work a true Miracle independently on God, or by his own innate power ; 2dly, That he can impose no false ones on our senses, if we exercise them as we may and should, and take that care, and use that circumspection, that it is in our power to do ; 3dly, That when the wickedest of men work Miracles, they never do it by a power derived from the Devil, but are the instruments which God is pleased to use, and have their power from Him alone ; ” and again, “ that God may sometimes use both wicked Spirits, and wicked Men, as his instruments, and work Miracles by them both, if He please.” Essay on Miracles, p. 20, 22. Other authors, as Werenfels, Le Moine, and Serceez, deny the reality of any Miracles said to have been wrought by Magicians, or evil Spirits, and regard them all as mere impostures. But Bp. Gastrel remarks, that “ there may be several reasons given why it may please God sometimes to work Miracles indifferently by the hands of *good* or *ill* men, men of a *true* or *false* Religion ; but it cannot possibly be supposed of God, that he should employ good men, or concur with the wicked, in working Miracles, in order to their deceiving mankind, and establishing a lie by such evidence as cannot be disproved ; and no instance can be given where any one *true Miracle* was wrought by a person that made use of it to prove any other Doctrine by, than what we have delivered in the *Scriptures*.” “ By a *true Miracle*,” he adds, “ I mean such as is *as well attested* to have been done as those recorded in the *Scriptures*, and can no more *be accounted for*, without the *power of God*, than they can ; many of which I will allow to have been done upon other occasions, without any application of them to the advantage of the *Religion* of those that



performed them." *Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, p. 284.

P. 272. l. 11. *By what rule are we to distinguish real from pretended Miracles?* The learned Werenfels, in his Dissertation on the question, *num miracula certa sint veritatis signa*, lays down the following clear and judicious rules on this head: "Ego, salvo aliorum iudicio, miraculum verum ex sequentibus notis certè dignosci posse existimo : —I. *Si homo ad doctrinæ suæ confirmationem facit opus conspicuum, quod, communi hominum consensu, humanam potentiam longè superat.*—II. *Si, qui fecit miraculum, antequam fecit, id futurum præcivit, promisit, fierique voluit, hoc verò ejus naturæ est, ut humanâ arte præciri non possit.*—III. *Si nihil causæ est, quare tale opus, ut illud adhuc descripsimus, alii potius causæ, minoris potentiae, tribuamus quàm DEO.*—IV. *Si, qui miraculum facit, apertè profitetur, aut manifestè præ se fert, se illud non suâ virtute facere, sed summi DEI, Creatoris cæli et terræ, neque ulla datur contra ejus testimonium sufficiens exceptio.*—Hæ quatuor conditiones, quando manifestè in opere aliquo extraordinario concurrunt, credo, sine periculo opus illud ad DEUM ipsum referri, et pro vero miraculo haberi posse, imò pro tali haberi debere. —Quanquam verò hoc ad verum miraculum ab aliis miris distinguendum sufficere credam; alia tamen circa miracula observari posse existimo, quæ faciunt ut certius et manifestius dignosci queant. 1. In *qualitate miraculorum*, si magna observatur similitudo, inter illa et alia indubitata DEI opera. 2. In *multitudine miraculorum*, quæ fiunt ab unico aliquo homine, aut quæ concurrunt ad ejusdem doctrinæ confirmationem. 3. In *personis eorum qui miracula faciunt*; si, præterquam quòd miracula faciunt, alia in iis elucet signa divinæ missionis; ut si, præter donum miraculorum, habent quoque donum prophetiæ, aut cognitionis eximie quam non acquisiverunt studio. 4. In *ipsâ doctrinâ miraculis confirmandâ*; quando illa non modò, ut suprâ requisivimus, doctrinæ sanæ multis miraculis confirmatæ non repugnat; sed insuper indicia plurima non obscura habet divinæ originis, ut quod valdè sapiens, DEO digna eique admodum gloriosa est; adde, si quodammodò nova est, ut tali confirmatione indigeat." *Opuscula Theologica*, diss. 5. p. 109—114. edit. 4to. Basil. 1718.

Ibid. l. 13. *One of the acutest writers on this subject.]* In this excellent work of the late Bp. Douglas, the sophistries of Hume are ably and concisely refuted; the delusions of Paganism and Popery are canvassed with great acuteness; and the Miracles recorded in the Gospel Histories are vindicated by unanswerable arguments. The

venerable Author lived to publish a new edition of this valuable Treatise, in this present year, 1807, just fifty years after the publication of the first, which appeared in the year 1757.

P. 275. l. 22. *Feeding thousands with a few small loaves and fishes.*] On this particular Miracle, it has been remarked by a judicious and highly-valued friend, (to whom the Author is indebted for several important suggestions,) that as our Blessed Lord, at each time that he mentions the performance of this Miracle, brings to the recollection of his disciples “how many baskets of the fragments they took up,” it should seem that this circumstance was intended to afford still stronger evidence of the *reality* of the Miracle, and to prove that there could be no delusion or fancy in what had been done; the miraculous increase of the provisions being rendered (if possible) still more palpable to the *senses*, in the quantity of fragments which remained, than by merely sending the multitude away satisfied.

P. 277. l. 11. *Their occurrence at such a time, and under such circumstances.*] See the late Mr. Bryant’s very learned and curious work *on the Plagues of Egypt*, in which this series of Miracles is critically investigated, and shewn to afford most convincing evidences of the Divine mission of Moses. See also Jenkin’s Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 1. part 2. ch. 6.

P. 278. l. 9. *Another very strong and convincing proof of their being the result of Divine agency, arising from their peculiar intent and propriety.*] See Dr. Owen’s Boyle’s Lectures *on the Intent and Propriety of the Scripture Miracles*, 2 vols. 8vo. 1773, where he has taken a full and comprehensive view of the subject as relating both to the Old and New Testament. The substance of these Lectures the learned Author had before published in a small Tract, with the same title, 8vo. 1755. See also Bryant *on the Plagues of Egypt*, and Jones’s *Lectures on the figurative Language of Scripture*, lect. 10.

P. 279. l. 8. *In the spiritual, no less than in the literal sense.*] Though this can hardly be insisted upon as a *direct* argument of the Divine character of these miracles, yet as a *collateral* one, evincing their wisdom and expediency, it is certainly not without it’s weight, and it has been treated as of considerable importance by distinguished Writers. Dr. Owen, in his B. Lect. vol. 1. serm. 18, takes this view of the subject. Dr. Jortin lays great stress upon it, in his Remarks on Eccl. Hist. v. 2. part 1. p. 267, where he says, “The Miracles of Christ were prophecies at the

same time ; they were such miracles as in a particular manner suited his character, they were significant emblems of his designs, and figures aptly representing the benefits to be conferred by him upon mankind, and they had in them, if we may so speak, a spiritual sense. So much may be urged in behalf of this interpretation of them, as shall probably secure it from being ranked amongst those *fanciful expositions* which are generally slighted by wise men." Bp. Horsley dilates upon the figurative signification of our Lord's miracles in his admirable Sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral, on the Anniversary Meeting of the Charity Schools, 4to. 1793, where, in exposition of his text, (Luke iv. 18, 19,) he says, "it is probable that all these expressions of the poor, the broken-hearted, the captive, the blind, and the bruised, carry something of a mystic meaning, denoting moral disorders and deficiencies under the image of natural calamities and imperfections ; and that the various benefits of redemption are described, under the notion of remedies applied to those natural afflictions and distempers." And again, "when of both meanings of a prophet's phrase, the literal and the figurative, either seems equally clear and admissible, the true rule of interpretation seems to be, that the phrase is to be understood of both. This seems a clear conclusion from the very nature of our Lord's miracles, which, for the most part, were actions distinctly symbolical of one or other of the spiritual benefits of the Redemption ; as such, they were literal completions of the prophecies, taking the place, as it were, of the prophecies so completed, pointing to another latent meaning, and to a higher completion ; and thus forming a strict and wonderful union between the Letter and the Spirit of the prophetic language." P. 11, 13.

P. 281. l. 25. *The mark set upon Cain (or, as some interpret it) the sign given to him.]* A learned friend has reminded me, that by some respectable authorities this latter interpretation is adopted, as being more conformable with the original, than our present translation. See Shuckford's *Connections*, vol. 1. p. 8. *Universal Hist.* vol. 1. p. 155. edit. 1747, taken from Shuckford. Bp. Newton's *Dissertation* 3d. *on the History of the Antediluvian World.* Stackhouse's *Hist. of the Bible*, vol. 1. in loc. If this rendering be deemed preferable, the notion which some have entertained, that the mark set upon Cain might probably have been transmitted to his posterity, and have distinguished the Cainite from the Sethite race, falls to the ground ; and indeed I incline to the opinion,

suggested to me from another learned quarter, that this notion can hardly be deemed *probable*, since the specified intention of the mark or sign given to Cain was, "*lest any should kill him.*" The argument, however, so far as it relates to some *significant and appropriate* miracle having been wrought on the occasion, is, in either case, equally valid.

P. 281. l. 15. *Indicated the Divine purpose of preventing an intermixture of idolaters and atheists with the worshippers of the true God.*] I am aware that the Divine judgments at Babel are by many considered as intended only to frustrate that gigantic design of *universal empire* which Nimrod and his associates laboured to establish. But after an attentive consideration of the authorities referred to on this subject in the 2nd Lect. of this work, I cannot but incline to think that the defeat of some vast scheme of impiety and idolatry was, in part, at least, the purpose of these judgments. But should this *not* appear to be the case, still, as in the subject of the preceding article, the miraculous dispersion and confusion of this disobedient race, will appear equally appropriate as to its intent and signification.

P. 282. l. 13. *Every Miracle wrought under the Jewish Theocracy, &c.*] Additional light has been thrown on several of the most disputed Miracles of the Old Testament, by the late learned Mr. Bryant, in his *Observations on some Select Passages of Scripture*, in which, as in his *Treatise on the Plagues of Egypt*, he brings forward some valuable treasures of classical and historical learning, in illustration of these narratives of Holy Writ, and shews, with much ingenuity, how admirably these divine interpositions were adapted to put to confusion the idolaters of the Heathen world, and almost to force upon them an acknowledgment of the Supreme JEHOVAH.

P. 283. l. 23. *The prodigies which Unbelievers bring into comparison with them, are destitute of all those marks of credibility, which arise from any inherent propriety, or from any perceptible connection with a design to which the least degree of importance may be attached.*] "It has been often asked," says Mr. Bryant, "as there have been accounts of miracles in all ages, *how are we to distinguish between the true and the false? By what rule can we proceed in order to make a proper estimate?* Let the miracles of our Saviour be laid down for a rule, by which others may be measured, and see if those others will abide that test. See if there were a due call for the Divine interposition; if the objects were worthy of that influence which is afforded by the Holy Spirit.



Did they tend to the good of the soul, as well as to the health of the body : and were they attended with that internal evidence with which those of our Saviour were accompanied ? And were they authenticated by such external evidence, as those in the Scriptures are known to have been : and had they multitudes who witnessed to their truth ? For, as the Apostle says of the operations of Christ, *These things were not done in a corner*. From hence we may obtain a criterion, by which we may distinguish between truth and falsehood ; and not be misguided by any legendary fictions.” *Treatise on the Authenticity of the Scriptures, and the Truth of the Christian Religion*, 8vo. 1792. p. 107.

P. 284. l. 10. *To the labours of such writers as have made it their study to investigate the subject, &c.*] For the use of those who may wish to pursue the inquiry, I subjoin the following references to several works of great authority, which have been consulted on the subject of this Lecture, but which may not have been specified in the preceding notes. Raymundi Martini *Pugio Fidei*, part 2. cap. 8. §. 5—10.—Deylingii *Observationes Sacræ*, part 2. obs. 17. p. 184, and part 3. obs. 5. p. 39. Lips. 4to. 1708.—Thomæ Aquinatis *Summa Theologiæ*, part 1. qu. 105. art. 6, 7, 8. p. 188.—qu. 110. art. 4. p. 197.—qu. 114. art. 4. p. 203.—Also part 3. qu. 43. art. 1, 2, 4. p. 98, 99.—qu. 44. art. 1—4. p. 99—101.—edit. Paris. fol. 1607.—Dr. T. Jackson’s Works, vol. i. b. 3. ch. 21.—Smith’s *Appeal for the Christian Religion*, b. 1. ch. 1, 3. and b. 4. ch. xi.—Dr. Clarke’s Evidences of Nat. and Rev. Religion, prop. 14.—Bp. Leng’s Boyle’s Lect. serm. 13, 14.—Dr. Gurdon’s Boyle’s Lect. serm. 12.—Dr. Twells’s Boyle’s Lect. 5 first sermons.—Dr. Stebbing’s Boyle’s Lect. part 2. p. 353—450.—Chapman’s *Eusebius*, vol. 1. ch. 2. p. 69—151.—White’s Bampton Lect. serm. 7. p. 283—304, and the notes, p. 50—60.—Jortin’s Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. 1. p. 257—281. 2nd edit.—Dr. Hey’s Lectures in Divinity, b. 1. ch. 15, 16.—Leland’s *View of Deistical Writers*, vol. 1. letters 18—21, in refutation of Hume’s Essay on Miracles.—Bryant’s *Treatise on the Scriptures*, as above, sect. 3. p. 92—115.

## SERMON XXII.

P. 288. l. 23. *It is probably for want of duly considering the right use of Prophecy, that many unwarrantable exceptions have been sometimes made against it.*] Bp. Sherlock, in his admirable Discourses on the Use and Intent of Prophecy, in the several Ages of the World, remarks, that “ it is a great prejudice against this argument, when men



come to it expecting more from it than it will yield ;” and he adduces, particularly in his 2nd Discourse, a variety of considerations to shew the especial purposes for which this species of evidence was intended ; and it’s sufficiency to answer those purposes, notwithstanding the obscurity and imperfection with which it is continually charged by the adversaries of our faith. Bishop Hurd, in like manner, observes, that “the argument from Prophecy, in support of the Christian Revelation, would be thought more conclusive, at least would be more distinctly apprehended, if men could be kept from mixing their own prejudices and preconceptions with it.” To this end, the learned Prelate shews the variety of *false ideas*, which have been entertained respecting the *subject*, the *end*, and the *dispensation* of Prophecy, from considering it as if it were to be conducted on *human* views and motives, instead of being framed and directed by the omniscient *Spirit of God*. He then establishes the *true idea* of Prophecy, which is, that “the scope and end of it was *the testimony of Jesus* ;” that “it has no other use or end, but to do honour to Him ;” and that “on this principle we are to regulate all our reasonings on the subject.” “They,” says he, “who maintain, and they who would confute it’s pretensions, must equally go on this supposition. If the system of Prophecy can be justified, or so far as it can be justified, on these grounds, the defence must be thought solid and satisfactory ; because those grounds are not arbitrarily assumed, but are such as that system itself acknowledges. On the contrary, whatever advantage may be fairly taken of those grounds to discredit Prophecy, must needs be allowed, for the same reason.” The *conclusions* drawn from this idea of Prophecy, are, that, from the immensity of such a scheme, “a considerable degree of *obscurity* may be reasonably expected to attend the *delivery* of the Divine predictions ;” that “Prophecies of a *double sense* may well be expected ;” that “it is very conceivable and credible that the line of Prophecy should run chiefly in one family and people ;” and that if, even after a mature consideration of the prophecies, and of the events in which they are taken to be fulfilled, there should, after all, be some cloud remaining on this subject, which with all our wit or pains we cannot wholly remove, this state of things would afford no objection to Prophecy, because it is indeed no other than we might reasonably expect.” See the three first Discourses of Bp. Hurd’s Warburton Lectures ; which, together with the discourses of Bp. Sherlock, just referred to, give a complete illustration of the *general* idea of Prophecy, and lay

down such *principles* for the investigation of the subject, as may with ease be applied in refutation of the most specious objections of infidel writers.

P. 289. l. 21. *A Divine mission may be satisfactorily proved by Miracles alone, without the additional aid of Prophecy.*] See Bp. Sherlock, as above, disc. 2. p. 41. 3d edit. 1732.

Ibid. l. ult. *But Prophecy appears to have been necessary in the case of the Jews in particular.*] “The ancient Prophecies,” says Bishop Sherlock, “though they are evidence both to the *Jew* and to the *Gentile*, yet are they not so to both in the same way of reasoning and deduction, nor to the same end and purpose. For, consider; the *Jew* was possessed of the Oracles of God, and firmly persuaded of the truth of them: the very first thing therefore which he had to do upon the appearance of the *Messiah*, was to examine his title, by the characters given of him in the Prophets: he could not, consistently with his belief in God and Faith in the ancient Prophecies, attend to other arguments, till fully satisfied and convinced in this. All the Prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the office and character of the Messiah were immoveable bars to all pretensions, till fulfilled and accomplished in the Person pretending to be the promised and long-expected Redeemer. For this reason, the Preachers of the Gospel, in applying to the *Jews*, begin with the argument from Prophecy.” Again;—“The Jews lived under a Divine Law, established in signs and wonders and mighty works, founded in very great promises on one side, in threatenings of mighty terror on the other, as far as the blessings and terrors of this world can extend: they are warned over and over, not to forsake their Law, or to suffer any strange customs and ceremonies to grow up among them. These cautions, intended to preserve them from the corruptions of the Heathen nations around them, might easily, as in the event they have done, grow into prejudices against any future Revelation, though made upon the authority of God himself. To guard against such prejudices, and to render them without excuse, it was but reasonable to give them early and frequent notice of the change intended, that they might not, under the colour of adhering steadfastly and faithfully to God’s first covenant, reject his second, when the time of publication came.” Discourses on Prophecy, p. 157, 162.

P. 290. l. 17. *To us, on the other hand, the evidence drawn from the fulfilment of Prophecy becomes also necessary.*] “One of the characters, which our Saviour con-

stantly assumes and claims in the Gospel, is this, That He is the person spoken of by Moses and the Prophets. Whether He is this person, or no, must be tried by the words of Prophecy: and this makes the argument from Prophecy so far necessary to establish the claim of the Gospel; and it has been very *justly*, as well as *acutely* observed, that the proof of this point must rest entirely on the evidence of Prophecy. Miracles in this case can afford no help: if the Prophets have not spoken of Christ, all the Miracles in the world will not prove that they have spoken of Him. These considerations shew how far the Gospel is necessarily concerned in prophetical evidence. *Christ* has done the works which no man ever did, and given the fullest evidence of a Divine commission; but he claims to be the Person foretold in the Law and the Prophets; and as truth must ever be consistent with itself, this claim must be true, or it destroys all others. This is the point then to be tried on the evidence of Prophecy: Is *Christ* that Person described and foretold under the Old Testament, or no? Whether all the Prophecies relating to Him be plain, or not plain: Whether all the ways used by the Jews in arguing from the Old Testament, be convincing to us, or no, it matters little: the single question is, Is there enough plain, to shew us that *Christ* is the person foretold under the Old Testament? If there is, we are at an end of our inquiry, and want no further help from Prophecy; especially since we, to use St. Peter's expression, have, in this case, *seen the day dawn, and enjoyed the marvellous light of the Gospel of God.*" Bp. Sherlock on the Use and Intent of Prophecy, disc. 2. p. 42—44.

P. 291. l. 20. *The question, therefore, which has sometimes been agitated, whether Miracles or Prophecies afford the stronger attestation to Revealed Religion, seems to be unnecessary and injudicious.*] There is an excellent Tract, by Mr. Rotheram, entitled, *The Force of the Argument for the Truth of Christianity, drawn from a collective View of Prophecy*, 8vo. Oxford, 1753, the 3rd section of which contains a brief state of the question, *whether Prophecies or Miracles afford a stronger evidence for the Truth of Christianity.* "Why," says the author, "is this made a question by the enemies of Christianity? They who will not allow that it is supported by any strength of evidence at all, why do they go about to compare the strength of two distinct kinds of it's evidence; and, denying that there are any proofs for it's truth, why do they dispute by what means it's truth may be most effectually proved? Or why, again, is it debated amongst the *friends* of Christianity? If they

are satisfied in the whole of it's evidence, and feel that it's united force is strong enough to overthrow all opposition, and to work a full conviction in every unprejudiced mind, this is all that the service of Christianity demands; and it can be but an unprofitable curiosity at best, that can engage them to spend their leisure in inquiring into the separate and distinct forces of it's several parts. If several witnesses had given in their evidence in some depending cause, and the Jury were of opinion that their concurring testimony decided the matter so clearly as to leave no room for further doubts; for them to suspend their sentence till they had made a nice disquisition into the distinct weight of every single deposition, would be thought, at least, a superfluous exactness, and a delay which the service of the cause did not demand. 'Tis probable, therefore, that this question owes it's rise to a set of men not properly taken in under either of these classes. I mean those enemies of the Christian cause, who wear the mask of friends. Unable to gain their ends by open force, they craftily endeavour to divide it against itself, and thus to destroy it by it's own strength." P. 101. The comparative weight of these two kinds of Evidence is ably discussed in the subsequent part of the Tract. On the same subject, see also Bp. Halifax's Warb. Lect. serm. 1. p. 1—18: and Bp. Bagot's Warb. Lect. disc. 1. p. 19—25.

P. 292. l. 15. "*The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy.*" ] "Prophecy," says Bp. Hurd, "in the ideas of Scripture, was not ultimately given for the private use of this or that nation, nor yet for the nobler and more general purpose of proclaiming the superintending providence of the Deity, (an awful truth, which men might collect for themselves from the established constitution of nature,) but *simply* to evidence the truth of the Christian Revelation. It was *therefore* confined to one nation, purposely set apart to preserve and attest the oracles of God; and to exhibit, in their public records and whole history, the proofs and credentials of an amazing dispensation, which God had decreed to accomplish in Christ Jesus." See his W. Lect. serm. 2, 3. on the text Rev. xix. 10.

Ibid. l. 24. *Divines have arranged the Prophecies concerning Christ under two general heads.* ] See Bp. Hurd's W. Lect. serm. 7. p. 211—213. and Bp. Bagot's W. Lect. disc. 3.

P. 293. l. 18. *Connected with this first and great design, there are Prophecies of a different class, in which are predicted the rise or fall of particular persons, families, or states.* ]



These Prophecies of a *temporal* nature are distinctly considered in Dr. Worthington's Boyle's Lectures, in a regular series from disc. 7. to disc. 16. inclusive.

P. 294. l. 1. *They who duly consider the prodigious extent and complicated nature of such a plan,—will be prepared to meet with something of intricacy, and even obscurity in the detail.*] Many excellent observations on the necessary and unavoidable obscurity of certain Prophecies, and of the wise reasons for which that obscurity might be permitted, occur in Bp. Sherlock's discourses on Prophecy, disc. 2; and in Bp. Hurd's W. Lect. serm. 3.

Ibid. l. 23. *objections are continually advanced against the evidence of Prophecy, grounded on the alleged obscurity of some particular predictions.*] We may venture to affirm, however, that there are few, if any, of these objections which have not received distinct and satisfactory answers from some able writers and commentators on the Holy Scriptures. Among the works written expressly in refutation of Collins's mischievous book on this subject, entitled "*the Scheme of literal Prophecy considered,*" were Bp. Chandler's *Defence of Christianity from the Prophecies of the Old Testament*, with a subsequent *Vindication of the Defence*; Dr. Bullock's *Sermons on the Reasoning of Christ and his Apostles*; Dr. Twells's Boyle's Lectures, and several other valuable Treatises.

Ibid. l. 27. *Our Adversaries often argue, as if it were necessary that men who are divinely inspired should have as distinct an apprehension of what they predict, as those who are to be eye-witnesses of the events.*] How contrary this opinion is to the notion which the inspired Writers themselves had of the word of Prophecy, Bp. Sherlock very clearly shews, in his second Discourse on Prophecy, p. 26—31. Bp. Hurd also treats this as one of the *false ideas of Prophecy*, and refutes it with great force and spirit in his Warb. Lect. serm. 1. p. 18—20. This, however, was urged by Lord Herbert, of Cherbury, as an insuperable objection to the prophetic gift. See Kortholt *de tribus Impostoribus*, sect. 1. §. 34.

P. 295. l. 18. *We must beware of forming extravagant notions of the extent of prophetic Inspiration.*] Many important observations on the gift of Prophecy may be found in J. Smith's select Discourses, 4to. Cambridge, 1673, disc. 6, of *Prophesie*, a very curious and elaborate Treatise. See also Dr. T. Jackson's Works, vol. 1. b. 3. ch. 21. sect. xi. and vol. 2. b. 7. ch. 16.—Bp. Stillingfleet's Orig. Sacr. b. 2. ch. 4. and ch. 6. §. 3, 4.—Wheatley's Sermons, vol. 1.



serm. 2. on *the Schools of the Prophets*.—Gurtleri *Systema Theologiae Propheticae*, 4to. Trajecti ad Rhenum, 1724, cap. 2, 3.—Molinaei *Vates, seu de preconitione futurorum, et bonis malisque Prophetis*, 12mo. Gorinchemi, 1672, cap. 9, 10, 18.—Cuperi *Arcana Atheismi*, l. 1. cap. 1, 2.

P. 297. l. 9. *to direct the Jews in particular to a better Covenant than that which, for temporary purposes only, had been vouchsafed to them.*] As a *Covenant*, the Jewish Law was superseded and annulled by the Christian Dispensation: and being only of *temporary duration*, may, in that sense, be said to have been designed for *temporary purposes only*. It is not meant, however, to infer that the Jewish Dispensation was of importance only to that people, or during that period in which it subsisted: on the contrary, such is the relation which it bears to the Patriarchal Religion which preceded it, and to the Christian, to which it was introductory, that we cannot form a competent notion of the Gospel itself, considered as one grand design carried on by the Almighty from the fall of Adam to the end of the world, without taking into account the Mosaical Covenant as an essential part of it, illustrative of it's object, as well as instrumental to it's completion. In this sense, therefore, the Jewish Dispensation may justly be regarded as not merely of a *temporary* nature, but as of perpetual and universal importance. For a comprehensive view of this subject, see Mr. Archdeacon Daubeny's *Eight Discourses on the Connection between the Old and New Testament, considered as two parts of the same Divine Revelation*, 8vo. 1802.

Ibid. l. 18. *It will not be denied, that, at the time of our Lord's coming into the world, a very general expectation of the birth of some extraordinary person prevailed.*] "It were endless to enumerate all the prophecies of the Old Testament, which have been supposed to point at Jesus: and the controversy concerning the application of *some* Prophecies to Him may be thought difficult. But it is very certain that the Jews, before the coming of Christ, gave this construction to their Scriptures: they even looked beyond the letter of their sacred books, and conceived the testimony of the Messiah to be the soul and end of the commandment. *The spirit of Prophecy* was so firmly believed to intend that *testimony*, that the expectation was general of some such person as Jesus, to appear among them, and at the very time in which He made his appearance. This, I say, is an undoubted *fact*, what account soever may be given of it; and so far evinces that the

*principle*, delivered in the text, [*Rev. xix. 10.*] corresponds entirely to the idea which the fathers entertained of the prophetic spirit." Bp. Hurd's W. Lect. serm. 2. p. 35.

P. 298. l. 28. *a series of facts corresponding with the general tenor of Scripture Prophecy.*] See Bp. Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies; Mr. Whiston's Boyle's Lect. on the Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies; Dr. Worthington's Boyle's Lectures; and Mr. Archdeacon Nares's Warb. Lect. containing *A connected and chronological view of the Prophecies relating to the Christian Church.*

P. 300. l. 20. *let him thus examine the whole, on an enlarged and comprehensive scale.*] Bp. Sherlock, in his Discourses on Prophecy, strongly urges the necessity of taking this connected view of the subject, and of considering the force of the accumulated mass of evidence which might thus be collected. Dr. Middleton, however, in his *Examination* of Bp. Sherlock's book, thought fit to treat both the argument and it's Author with great contempt and scurrility, but with little force of reasoning. He was ably answered by Dr. Rutherford, Mr. Laurence Jackson, Mr. Rotheram, and others. Bp. Hurd too has briefly noticed and refuted Dr. Middleton's objections, in his W. Lect. serm. 2. p. 47—51, where he contends, "that the argument from Prophecy is not to be formed from the consideration of single Prophecies, but from all the Prophecies taken together, and considered as making one system; in which, from the mutual dependence and connection of it's parts, preceding Prophecies prepare and illustrate those which follow, and these, again, reflect light on the foregoing: just as, in any philosophical system, that which shews the solidity of it, is the harmony and correspondence of the whole, not the application of it in particular instances." He adds, "Hence, though the evidence be but small, from the completion of any one Prophecy, taken separately, yet, that evidence being always something, the amount of the whole evidence, resulting from a great number of Prophecies, all relative to the same design, may be considerable; like many scattered rays, which, though each be weak in itself, yet, concentrated into one point, shall form a strong light, and strike the sense very powerfully. Still more: this evidence is not simply a growing evidence, but is indeed multiplied upon us, from the number of reflected lights, which the several component parts of such a system reciprocally throw upon each: till, at length, the conviction rise into a high degree of moral certainty." The same argument

from a collective view of the Prophecies is also very forcibly urged by Bp. Butler, in his *Analogy of Religion*, part 2. ch. 7. p. 444—466. edit. 7th. 1785.

P. 302. l. 7. *some clear and certain rules, by which we may distinguish between the true and false spirit of Prophecy.*] The learned Gurtler lays down the following rules on this subject. “*Superest nunc declaranda quæstio: quinam fuerint sacris Dei Vatibus impressi characteres, ver quos populus Dei illos à falsis Prophetis discernere potuerit?*—Prima falsi Prophetæ nota est, commendatio alterius Dei præter Jehovam; vel seductio ad cultum Idolorum. Deut. xiii. 1—5.—Secunda nota falsi Prophetæ est eventus prædictioni non respondens. Deut. xviii. 21, 22. Jer. xxviii. 9, 15—17. 1 Reg. xxii. 24. et seq.—Tertius falsi Prophetæ character est, defectus charitatis erga hominem sibi proximum. 1 Joan. iv. 6, 7. 1 Joan. iii. 10. Jer. xviii. 20.—Quarta nota falsi Prophetæ est propositio doctrinæ cum veritate et honestate, aut cum privilegiis filiorum Dei, pugnantis. Mich. ii. 11. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3. 2 Pet. ii. 12.—Quinta nota fallacium Prophetarum est mala vita et prava conversatio. Matth. vii. 15—18. Matth. xxiii. 14, 23. 2 Tim. iii. 2—5. Tit. i. 11. 2 Pet. ii. 3.—Sexta et ultima nota falsi Prophetæ sub N. T. est imminutio gloriæ Jesu Christi, quæ fit per abnegationem divinitatis ejus, per substitutionem novæ humanitatis, et per associationem alterius Mediatoris, Regis, Pontificis, Doctorisque falli et fallere nescii. 1 Joan. xi. 22, 23. 1 Joan. iv. 2, 3, 15. 1 Joan. v. 12.—Itaque is pro falso haberi debet Prophetâ, qui peregrini Dei cultum suadet; rem non implendam prænunciat; amore erga homines ipsum audientes destituitur; doctrinam cum recto et decoro, sive cum privilegiis filiorum Dei, pugnantem affert; honorem, divitias, et voluptates hujus mundi, magis quàm gloriam Dei et hominum salutem, curat: et de gloriâ Jesu Christi detrahit.” *System. Theol. Proph. cap. 3. §. 41—51.* See also Lowth’s *Vindication of the Divine Authority and Inspiration of the Old and New Testament*, ch. 4. p. 165—173. edit. 2d. 1699.

*Ibid. l. 12. in what respects the Scripture Prophecies differ from the Heathen Oracles.*] This is a subject which has employed many of our most distinguished Scholars and Divines, to whom I must refer the Reader for more particular information. Those which I have chiefly examined, are Dr. T. Jackson’s works, as above; Houtteville’s *la Relig. Chr. prouvée par les faits*, l. 3. *difficulté sixième*; Fontenelle *sur les Oracles*; Van Dale *de Oraculis*; Molinæi *Vates*, l. 3; Mornæi *de Ver Chr. Rel-*



cap. 23; Buddei de Atheismo et Superstit. c. 3. §. 4; Jortin's *Remarks on Eccl. Hist.* vol. 1. p. 80—150; Dr. Berriman's Sermons, vol. 1. serm. 1; and Mr. Archdeacon Nares's Warb. Lect. serm. 1. on the *Contrast between Pagan Divination and True Prophecy.*

P. 308. l. 6. *The Sibylline Oracles.*] See Dr. T. Jackson's Works, vol. 2. b. 7. ch. 8; Blondel on the Sibylline Oracles; Jortin's *Eccl. Hist.* vol. 1. p. 188—217; Molinæi *Vates*, l. 3. c. 12—14; Van Dale, *Dissertationes*, part 2. cap. 6, 7; Mornæi *de Verit. Chr. Rel.* c. 31. p. 520. et seq.

P. 311. l. 12. *whether we ascribe them to human fraud and artifice, or to the delusion of evil Spirits, it will be found that they were, in every instance, eventually overruled by some manifest interposition of Divine agency.*] See Fleetwood, Le Moine, and Du Sercez, on Miracles, as already referred to in the preceding Lecture.

P. 312. l. 6. *Saul had recourse to the witch of Endor.*] See a valuable Discourse by Dr. Waterland on this portion of Scripture History, vol. 2. serm. 14.

P. 314. l. 11. *The double sense of many Prophecies.*] On this point Bp. Hurd observes, that “we may clearly discern the difference between *Pagan Oracles* and *Scriptural Prophecies*. Both have been termed obscure and ambiguous; and an invidious parallel hath been made, or insinuated, between them. The Pagan oracles were indeed *obscure*, sometimes to a degree that no reasonable sense could be made of them: they were also *ambiguous*, in the worst sense; I mean, so as to admit contrary interpretations. The Scriptural Prophecies we own to be *obscure*, to a certain degree; and we may call them, too, *ambiguous*; because they contained two consistent, indeed, but different meanings. But here is the distinction I would point out to you. The obscurity and ambiguity of the Pagan oracles had no necessary or reasonable cause in the subject on which they turned: the obscurity and ambiguity of the Scriptural Prophecies have an evident reason in the system to which they belong. As the Pagan predictions had near and single events for their object, the fate, perhaps, of some depending war, or the success of some council, then in agitation, they might have been clearly, precisely delivered; and in fact we find that such of the Jewish predictions as foretold events of that sort and character, were so delivered. But the Scriptural Prophecies under consideration respecting one immense scheme of Providence, it might be expedient that the remoter parts should be obscurely revealed; as it was surely natural

that the connected parts of such a scheme should be shewn together. We see, then, what force there is in that question, which is asked with so much confidence—*Is it possible, that the same character can be due to the Jewish Prophecies, which the wise and virtuous in the Heathen world considered as an argument of fraud and falsehood, in the Pythian prophecies?* First, we say, the character is not entirely the same in both: and, secondly, that so far as it is the same, that character is very becoming in the Jewish, but utterly absurd in the Pythian prophecies. What was owing to fraud or ignorance in the Pagan Divines, is reasonably ascribed to the depth and height of that wisdom, which informed the Jewish Prophet." See Warb. Lect. serm. 3. p. 72—74, and from p. 62 to p. 72, containing a fine passage from Lord Bacon, who speaks with admiration of this double or secondary sense of Prophecy, as one striking argument of it's Divinity. See also Dr. T. Jackson's Works, vol. 2. b. 7. ch. 17; Lowth on the Inspiration of Scripture, ch. 3. p. 134—148; Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. 1. p. 120—124; Nares's Warb. Lect. serm. 3, 4, 5, in which are also some important and very judicious observations on the use of *Types*, and their connection with Prophecies of a double sense.

P. 316. l. 7. *Infidels oftentimes have recourse to frivolum inquiries respecting the manner in which the Prophets were affected by the Divine afflatus.*] Although inquiries of this nature can have little weight in determining what degree of credit is due to the Prophecies themselves, yet those who are desirous of investigating the subject, may find it discussed with much learning and ingenuity in J. Smith's Discourse on Prophecy, above referred to, ch. 4, 5, 6. See also Molinæi Vates, l. 3. c. 5; Gurtleri Theol. Prophetic. c. 2, 3.

P. 317. l. 6. *exceptions have sometimes been made to the characters of the Prophets.*] The injurious misrepresentations of *Spinosa*, than whom no Infidel perhaps has taken more pains to vilify the Prophetical character, were ably repelled by Cuper in his *Arcan. Atheismi*, l. 1. c. 2, 3; and by Buddeus *de Atheismo et Superstitione*, c. 3. §. 4. and c. 7. §. 4. See also Gurtleri Theol. Proph. c. 1; Molinæi Vates, l. 1. c. 10; J. Smith's Disc. on Prophecy, ch. 6, 8; Lowth on the Inspiration of Scripture, ch. 3. p. 108—118. The cavils of *Voltaire* on the conduct of the Prophets have been successfully answered in the *Lettres de quelques Juifs; Supplement à la Philosophie d'Histoire*; and other valuable works. Satisfactory expositions of those occurrences relating to the Jewish Prophets



which have been made an occasion of scoffing and ridicule, may be found in most of the Commentators on Holy Writ.

P. 321. l. 2. *Judaism has in a great measure rendered it of none effect, by such a perverse misapplication of it, as now makes it, with respect to Jewish expectations, a vain and illusory scheme.*] “Sermo namque Propheticus, et maximè de adventu Messiae, quodocunque à Judæis exponitur Judaicè, semper et ubique renititur, et, juxta eorum expositionem, absurda et impossibilia continet, et invenitur mendax. Quando verò de Domino Jesu, et sibi pertinentibus accipitur, ut ex solis etiam quæ dicta sunt haberi potest, occurrit, consentit, consonat et obedit; nihil impossibile, nihil absurdum ingerit, sed invenitur verax.” Raymundi Martini *Pugio Fidei*, part 2. cap. 8. 365.

The following additional list of Authors consulted on the subject of this Lecture, may perhaps be of use to the Theological Student. Deylingii *Observ. Sacræ*. part 1. p. 22. part 3. p. 81.—Pfanneri *Systema Theologiæ Gentilis*.—Origen *contra Celsum*.—Limborechi *Amica Collatio cum erudito Judæo*.—Cattenburghi *Syntagma Sapientiæ Mosaicæ*.—Kortholti *de tribus Impostoribus*.—Reimanni *Hist. Atheismi et Atheorum*.—Mede’s Works.—Smith’s *Christian Religion’s Appeal*, b. 1. ch. 5. b. 2. ch. 6, 9, 10, 11. b. 4. ch. 2, 3, 9.—Clarke’s *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, prop. 14.—Dr. Berriman’s Boyle’s Lect. serm. 3—15.—Chapman’s *Eusebius*, vol. 1. ch. 2, 6.—Dr. Apthorp’s Warb. Lect. serm. 1, 2. with the Notes to each.—Dr. Stebbing’s Boyle’s Lect. p. 288—352.—Bp. Butler’s *Analogy*, part 2. ch. 7.—Dr. Hey’s *Lectures in Divinity*, b. 1. ch. 17.—Dr. Powell’s Discourses, serm. 8, 9.—Gray’s *Key to the Old Testament, general preface to the Prophets*.—Kett’s *History the Interpreter of Prophecy*, introductory chapter.—Churton’s Bampton. Lect. serm. 3. p. 103—123.—Wintle’s Bampton. Lect. serm. 2, 3, 4.—Richards’s Bampton. Lect. passim.—Croft’s Bampton. Lect. serm. 2.

### SERMON XXIII.

P. 325. l. 27. *we need only contend for that kind or degree of Inspiration, which may give to the Authors of the Bible the proper character of Sacred Writers.*] “This, as I understand it,” says Dr. Horbery, “is the general notion of Inspiration, so far as it concerns the Scriptures; it is such a Divine impulse and influence on the minds of those who wrote them, as makes what they write to be not the word of men, but the Word of God: inspired men, in

writing the Scriptures, wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But there are different degrees of this motion of the Holy Spirit, and some had as it were a double portion of it, according as the nature and subject of their writings required. This is the foundation of the distinction between Inspiration of *Suggestion*, and Inspiration of *Direction*. In the former case, the Writer knew nothing naturally of what he was about to deliver, but the very matter was suggested to him, and the words themselves sometimes dictated by the Spirit. I do not mean, that the Spirit dictated a new language, or furnished him with the invention of words; but only that he guided him in the choice. This was necessary in points of a sublime and abstruse nature; where an improper expression would defeat the very design of the Revelation, and convey an idea different from what was intended. In the latter case, the case of Inspiration of *Direction*, the Writer might be a competent master of the subject himself, so far as to use, in some measure, his own understanding and judgment, and his own manner of expression: but still there was a Divine conduct and superintendency: the Spirit still guided and enlightened his mind, revealing whatever was necessary to be revealed, and preserving him from every material error and mistake." Horbery's Sermons, 8vo. 1774. serm. 9. p. 227. See also Lowth on *the Divine Authority and Inspiration of the Old and New Testament*, ch. 1. p. 28—33.

P. 327. l. 1. *To suppose a partial Inspiration only, is, in effect, destroying the authority of the whole.*] Bp. Warburton, however, speaks of "the advantages resulting from a *partial* Inspiration," such as he contends for and explains. But then it is evident, from the definition which he had just before given of the sense in which Inspiration is to be understood, that he means to establish such a notion of it as in effect amounts to a *plenary* Inspiration, according to the usual acceptation of that term. For, he speaks of it as "*watching over the Writers incessantly*," though "with so suspended a hand, as permitted the use, and left them to the guidance of their own faculties, while they kept clear of error; and then only interposing when, without this Divine assistance, they would have been in danger of falling." This notion corresponds very exactly with that which Dr. Horbery, as quoted in the preceding note, calls Inspiration of *Direction*, as distinguished from that of *Suggestion*, in which the very matter, and even sometimes the words themselves, were dictated by the Spirit. Bp. Warburton, therefore, cannot, in any

fair construction, be understood to approve of what is *commonly* meant by a *partial* Inspiration, denoting that *some* parts of the Scriptures are of *divine*, and *others* only of *human* authority, (since he expressly asserts it to be “the *true* idea of Inspiration,” that it should “fully answer the purpose of an inspired writing, which is to afford an INFALLIBLE RULE for the direction of the Catholic Church) but only to guard against the supposition that *all* Inspiration must necessarily be of such a kind as would *supersede the use of men’s natural faculties*. Whether, however, the term *partial* Inspiration be happily chosen to convey this meaning, may perhaps be questioned. See his *Doctrine of Grace*, b. 1. ch. 7.

P. 327. l. 12. *that the Sacred Writers constantly received from the Holy Spirit such a degree of assistance, as might suffice to give to every part of Scripture it’s sanction and authority, as the Word of God.*] “Our obligation to believe and obey the Scriptures does not arise from their having been written by Men, by whatever names or titles they might be distinguished; but from their containing and revealing the mind and will of God. This depends upon their Inspiration: so far therefore as you take away from *that*, so far you take away from the word of God; and leave in the room the words only of some fallible Men. It is therefore surprising to hear persons sometimes, who would pass for good Believers, give up the point of Inspiration with little reluctance: give it up, I mean, in part, as to some particular texts and passages; for if they give up the whole, they can be no better than Infidels. But surely we cannot be so weak as to think, that it is any trouble or difficulty to God, or the Spirit of God, to continue the influence or Inspiration on the writer’s mind, all the time he is writing: which seems too, in itself, a more rational and consistent notion, than a broken, interrupted Inspiration; which can produce at last only a motley composition, as it were, of divers colours, half human, half divine.” Horbery’s Sermons, serm. 9. p. 238. See also an excellent Sermon by Dr. Powell, *on the nature and extent of Inspiration*, disc. 15. p. 248, 249.

P. 328. l. 14. *The probability of such an Inspiration cannot reasonably be denied.*] “There seems,” says Dr. Powell, “to be no intelligible distinction between original Revelation and Inspiration. That supernatural knowledge may be communicated to the mind in various manners, we have no reason to deny: but the manners being all unknown to us, we can distinguish the gifts of the Spirit only by their effects. When one man was enabled to speak many



languages, another to prophesy, another to understand mysteries, or the obscure passages of the Old Testament, the diversity of the celestial gifts was evident; but, when the knowledge impressed was the same, we are able to conceive no difference in the impression. Whether we say, that the new doctrines were *revealed* or *inspired*, the meaning is exactly the same. They, whose understandings were furnished by the Holy Spirit with more than human knowledge, were *inspired*. They who committed such knowledge to writing made *inspired books*." See also Dr. Horbery, as above, serm. 9. p. 226.

P. 328. l. 25. *the expediency, or rather the necessity, of Inspiration, may be inferred from the very design of Revealed Religion.*] "I do not pretend," says Mr. Lowth, "to prescribe to God Almighty what method he shall use to discover his will to the world, or confine him to any one way of doing it: but this much I think I may safely say, that a *standing Rule of Faith* committed to writing is liable to less inconveniences and difficulties, than any other way of conveying down Divine Truth. Whereas all other ways that can be assigned of transmitting Divine Revelation are incumbered with so many difficulties, that, without a constant series of Miracles, they can never attain their end." Again; "We can imagine but two ways of God's communicating his Will to several successive ages, without the help of Writing; either *Oral Tradition*, or making a *particular Revelation* to every single person, or at least to all those whose business it is to teach and instruct others in their duty. Now, both these ways are liable to such difficulties, and do suppose so many immediate interpositions of God's Power, to prevent those errors which must of necessity attend them, (considering the present state of human nature,) as are not suitable to the methods which God uses in governing the world." Lowth on the Inspiration of Scripture, ch. 1. p. 5—7. See also Jenkin's *Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1. p. 15—21. The arguments urged by Bp. Stillingfleet, against requiring fresh Miracles to assure us of the Truth of Revealed Religion, apply with equal force to this part of our subject. "Is it not sufficient," says he, "that the charter of a Corporation had the Prince's Broad-seal in the time of the giving of it: but that every succession of men in that Corporation must have a new Broad-seal, or else they ought to question their Patent? What ground can there be for that, when the original Seal and Patent is preserved, and is certainly conveyed down from age to age? So I say it is as to us: God's grand Charter of

grace and mercy to the world through JESUS CHRIST, was sealed by Divine Miracles, at the delivery of it to the world; the original Patent, viz. the Scriptures wherein the Charter is contained, is conveyed in a most certain manner to us; to this Patent the Seal is annexed, and in it are contained those undoubted Miracles which were wrought in confirmation of it; so that a new sealing of this Patent is wholly needless, unless we have some cause of suspicion, that the original Patent itself were lost, or the first sealing was not true. If the latter, then the Christian Religion is not true, if the Miracles wrought for confirmation of it were false, because the truth of it depends so much on the verity and divinity of the Miracles which were then wrought. If the first be suspected, viz. the certain conveyance of the Patent, viz. the Scriptures, some certain grounds of such a suspicion must be discovered in a matter of so great moment, especially when the great and many societies of the Christian world do all consent unanimously in the contrary. Nay, it is impossible that any rational man can conceive that the Patent which we now rely upon, is supposititious or corrupted, in any of those things which are of concernment to the Christian world." Orig. Sacr. b. 2. ch. 10. §. 4.

P. 330. l. 12. *Respecting the internal evidence that the Scriptures are divinely inspired.*] "In the case of *Prophecy*, the writer naturally knew nothing; for men have not by nature the gift of Fore-knowledge. The predictions, therefore, which they delivered, were communicated to them by Divine Suggestion, or some immediate Divine Revelation, at least, equivalent to it. In *Doctrines* again of pure Revelation, which natural Reason knows nothing of, the Matter itself must be suggested. The Writers themselves had no idea or notion of these doctrines, till God had revealed them unto them by His Spirit. What, for instance, could St. John know, considered as a mere mortal, of the sacred and sublime Truths, with which he opens his Gospel? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.* This doctrine was not his, but His that sent him; was not the suggestion of his own mind, but the suggestion of the Spirit of God; and our Lord might have said to him, what he said once to Peter, *Flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.*" Horbery's Sermons, disc. 9. p. 228, 229. In like manner, the learned Buddeus, speaking of the perfection of the Scripture as an argument for it's Divine



authority, says, "Plenissimè enim quæ hominibus ad salutem consequendam necessaria sunt, exhibet. Quæ enim de miserâ humanâ, ejusque origine et profunditate, itemque de ratione per fidem in Christum inde eluctandi, ceu unico salutis obtinendæ medio, cognitu sunt necessaria, ratio aut planè ignorat, aut admodum obscurè cognoscit. Eadem ipsa verò ratio evidenter cognoscit, bonitatî divinæ consentaneam esse, medium aptum et conveniens divinæ justitiæ, hominibus suppeditare, per quod liberari à peccatis ac à calamitatibus omnibus queant. Cujusmodi medium cùm divina revelatio, quam Scriptura sacra sistit, nobis exhibeat, et sufficienter, quæ de his omnibus scitu sunt necessaria, tradat, eam à Deo ipso profectam esse, suâ sponte inde sequitur." *De Atheismo et Superstitione*, cap. 7. §. 7. p. 642. See also Mornæi de ver. Chr. Rel. c. 24; Werenfelsii Opuscul. Theolog. diss. 3. *de Præstantiâ Religionis in S. Scripturâ revelatæ*; Abbadie, *de la vérité de la Religion Chrétienne*, tom. 1. sect. 3. ch. 2. and tom. 2. sect. 2. ch. 13.

P. 331. l. 16. *it has pleased God to accompany them with such convincing external proofs of their proceeding from Him, as cannot be produced for any other writings.*] Abbadie thus argues from the proofs which Miracles and Prophecies afford of the Inspiration of the Sacred Writings. "On auroit quelque sujet de soupçonner ces revelations, si c'étoit un seul homme qui se vantât de les avoir : mais en voici plusieurs. Ce n'est pas en une seule manière que Dieu se révèle à eux, mais dans toutes les manières. Ils ne se contentent pas de dire, que Dieu leur a révélé quelque chose, pour la faire accroire ; ils font des miracles, ils parlent des langages, ils communiquent ces dons, ils convertissent par là l'Univers, et accomplissent les oracles de Dieu. Cet Esprit qui les remplit, et qui doit les remplir, puis que le temps de la vocation des Payens est arrivé, se produit au dehors par des effets qui confondent l'Incredulité.—Certainement, s'il est vrai que Dieu repandit son Esprit sur les Apôtres le jour de la Pentecôte, comme il l'est sans doute, ce ne fut que pour parler aux hommes par leur ministère ; à moins qu'on ne pretende que la langue des Apôtres qui étoit surnaturellement élevée jusqu'à parler toute sorte de langues, devoit se borner à cet emploi, et ne pas révéler aux hommes le conseil de Dieu. Que si nous devons regarder comme divine la parole que cette langue a annoncée, nous ne saurions nous empêcher aussi de regarder comme divins les Ecrits qui contiennent cette parole.—Si l'Ecriture du Nouveau Testament n'est point supposée, il est impossible que cer-

tains faits publics, et que l'on pose dans cette Ecriture être d'une notoriété publique entre les Chrétiens, ne soient vrais. Si ces faits sont vrais, on ne peut nier que les Apôtres n'eussent reçu le Saint Esprit. Si les Apôtres ont reçu le Saint Esprit, il est incontestable que leur Ecriture doit être regardée comme divine.—Il est donc vrai que l'Ecriture du Nouveau Testament est divine, et que nôtre Religion l'est aussi : car ces deux verités n'en sont proprement qu'une. La Religion des Chrétiens ne peut pas être divine, si la Parole ou l'Ecriture, qui est la règle de leur foi, est humaine : et l'Ecriture ne peut être divine, sans que la Religion des Chrétiens soit celeste et venuë de Dieu." See also Lowth on the Inspiration of Scripture, ch. 2. p. 57. and ch. 5. p. 196, to the end. Some excellent arguments to prove the Divine Authority of the Scriptures, both from its internal and external evidence, may be found in a Sermon by Bp. Seth Ward, *against the Anti-Scripturists*, 12mo. 1670.

P. 334. l. 8. *trivial errors*.] To prevent any misconception on this point, it may be proper to state, that, by "*trivial errors*," I mean such as relate to some trifling *variations* in the narrative of Scripture, which are wholly unimportant in themselves, and which, far from discrediting the history in general, rather serve to strengthen it's credibility by shewing that there could have been no collusion or confederacy among it's respective Authors. Such, for instance, are those which Paine, in his *Age of Reason*, has objected to, respecting the *Inscription on the Cross* ; with some others of a similar kind, which Bp. Watson has very satisfactorily accounted for, in his *Apology for the Bible*. Bp. Warburton, in contending against what he calls *organic* Inspiration, (or an Inspiration where "the language of Scripture was dictated by the Holy Spirit in such sort, that the Writers were but the passive organs through which every word and letter were conveyed," ) remarks, that "had the Scriptures been written under this organic Inspiration, there must have been the most perfect agreement amongst the four Evangelists, in every circumstance of the smallest fact. But we see there is not this perfect agreement. In some minute particulars, which regard neither faith nor manners, neither the truth nor certainty of the History in general, the several Writers vary from one another. A variation, which, though it discredits the notion of an organic Inspiration, yet (which is of much more importance) supports the fidelity of the Historian ; as it shews that they did not write in concert, or copy from one another ; but that each described the

proper impressions which the same fact had made upon himself." *Doctrine of Grace*, b. 1. ch. 6.

P. 334. l. ult. *Inspiration was subsidiary to these natural talents.*] "Works of Providence are not supposed to exclude human means, and we believe many things to be brought to pass by the determinate counsel and power of God, though they are not purely miraculous and merely God's own act and deed, but are brought to pass by second causes as His instruments. And why then cannot He give men a Rule of Faith and Manners, except the Writing be with the *immediate Finger of God*, as the *Two Tables* were? It is certain that the *ordinary* operations of the Spirit do only excite and assist our natural faculties, not supersede or render them useless. And even the *extraordinary* ones do very often influence men's minds after the same manner, as appears by St. Paul's advice to Timothy, (1 Tim. 4. 14.) *Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift which is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy.* And to the same purpose he speaks in 2. Tim. i. 6. And therefore, though we suppose the Authors of the Scripture to have been inspired, and to have had the extraordinary assistances of God's Spirit, yet this will not exclude the use of their natural talents, but that the Writers made use of them as far as they could be serviceable to their purpose, and God supplied their defects." Lowth on Inspiration of Scripture, ch. 1. p. 33.

P. 336. l. 17. *Hence the writings of some of the Prophets and the Apostles, occasionally betray the rustic simplicity of their modes of life, whilst those of others discover the air of persons bred in courts and in the schools.*] Dr. Powell observes, that "of whatever kind the language be, it had probably no other source than the natural abilities of the writers;" and in the case of St. Paul in particular, he shews, from a variety of features which distinguish his writings, that "the form and character of his Epistles appear to have been derived from the circumstances of his early life." See disc. 15. p. 250—255; also Lowth, as above, ch. 1. p. 34. and ch. 3. p. 109—113.

P. 337. l. 4. *Objections drawn from any supposed defects in the style of the inspired Writings, are almost too futile to deserve attention.*] These objections, however, have been often attentively considered, and successfully repelled. See, in particular, Bp. Warburton's *Doctrine of Grace*, b. 1. ch. 8, 9. where he enters largely into Dr. Middleton's cavils on this subject, and refutes them with his accustomed force



and spirit:—also Mr. Boyle's *Considerations on the Style of the Scriptures*, in his *Theological Works epitomized*, vol. 3. b. 2. part 1. ch. 4; Dr. Jenkin's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, vol. 2. ch. 3; Dr. Powell's *Sermons*, disc. 15. p. 40, 49; Dr. Horbery's *Sermons*, serm. 9. p. 229; Mornæi *de verit. Rel. Chr.* c. 24: Abbadie *de la vérité de la Rel. Chr.* tom. 1. sect. 3. ch. 2.

P. 337. l. 26. *respecting the argumentative talents of the Sacred Writers, Infidels are wont to express much dissatisfaction.*] “It is urged against the Divine Authority of St. Paul's Epistles, by Spinoza, that *they are full of argumentation*, which, he thinks, must be the effect of St. Paul's own reason. As if a man that had a perfect system of the Christian Religion infused into his mind by Revelation, as we suppose St. Paul to have had, did not apprehend it after a rational manner, and see the whole *series* and chain of it's principles, by the help of which he could infer the one from the other. But is it not a pleasant argument against the Inspiration of a Book, that it is writ in a rational and argumentative way? which must either suppose that it is below God Almighty to give a reason for his institutions; or else that it was not proper for the Apostles to shew their *disciples* that the doctrines they taught them were such as might be rationally deduced from certain principles, and to confute their *adversaries* the same way, who would not submit to their bare authority, nor believe a thing to be true, merely because they said so.” Lowth on Inspiration, ch. 1. p. 35. Buddeus also notices the same objection of Spinoza, and refutes it. See his *Treatise de Ath. et Superst.* ch. 7. §. 7. p. 650, 653.

P. 340. l. 8. *Few, however, if any of these, are found to be incapable of some consistent and satisfactory solution.*] Most of those writers who have employed themselves in compiling *harmonies* of the Sacred Writings, have considered these difficulties, and done as much as is necessary for the removal of them: and there is hardly any *Commentator* of repute, who does not afford a sufficient reply to these minute objections. Besides these, there are many valuable works, such as Pfeiffer's *Dubia vexata*, and others, which treat expressly on difficult passages of Scripture. But it should seem, that few of those who are in the habit of cavilling at the Sacred Writings, take the trouble to consult such works as these.

Ibid. l. 20. *it is always to be remembered, that when we speak of the Scriptures as divinely inspired, we speak of the original Writings, not of the Versions or Copies of them taken in later times.*] Bp. Warburton, contending,

as before, against *organic* Inspiration, observes, that “ the very words of Scripture must in this case have been preserved, throughout all ages, perfectly pure and free from the corruptions and mistakes of transcribers. For if it were expedient, useful, and sorting with the views of Divine Wisdom, that every word and letter should be inspired, it was equally expedient that every word and letter should be preserved uncorrupt; otherwise the Holy Spirit would appear to have laboured in vain. Now, general experience assures us, that this is not the case: frequent transcribing hath occasioned numerous variations in words and phrases throughout all the Scriptures of the New Testament. But though this opposes the notion of *organic* Inspiration, yet the harmless nature of the variations, which never disturb the sense, nor obscure a single proposition of Faith, or precept of good manners, affords us a noble instance of the gracious providence of God, in bringing down to us those Scriptures, destined for an *infallible rule*, incorrupt and entire, in all essential and even material points; though after escaping the impure hands of so many outrageous Bigots, schismatic Visionaries, and heretical Seducers, they had a long journey still to run through the dark cloisters of dreaming superstition, and of ignorance but half awake.” *Doctrine of Grace*, b. 1. ch. 6. See also Jenkin’s Reasonableness of Christianity, vol. 2. ch. 5. *on the various Readings in the Old and New Testament*. Mr. Boyle, in his *Considerations on the Style of Scripture*, very properly animadverts on those who find fault with it, merely from judging of it by the *Translations* they read it in. See as above, p. 96—100, and again, p. 155—157.

P. 342. l. 17. *Inspiration was evidently necessary to give to moral precepts a competent sanction, &c.*] Dr. Horbery has a valuable Sermon on *the Inspiration of the moral parts of Scripture*, in which the necessity and the certainty of it are enforced by unanswerable arguments. See Sermon 7. He again touches on the same point, in sermon 9. p. 234—236. See also some excellent observations on this subject in Mr. Boyle’s *Considerations on the Style of Scripture*, p. 143, &c.

P. 343. l. 5. *The Inspiration of the historical parts of Scripture.*] This point also is insisted upon by Dr. Horbery with equal strength of reasoning, in Sermon 9. p. 230. and p. 246—252. The 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Sermons in this volume, form together an admirable treatise on the whole subject of Inspiration.

P. 345. l. 3. *When St. Paul directed Timothy to bring*



*with him the cloak and the parchment from Troas, &c.]* See Bp. Bull's Sermon on this text, which this eminently learned prelate applies to shew, "that the poverty of the first Preachers of the Gospel was designed by Providence to convince the world of their sincerity; and that even persons divinely inspired, and Ministers of God, did not so wholly depend upon Divine Inspiration, but that they made use also of the ordinary help and means, such as reading of books, with study and meditation on them, for their assistance in the discharge of their office."

P. 348. l. 20. *How shall we draw the line between true and false Inspiration?*] Dr. Gloucester Ridley, in his L. Moyer's Lectures, has an excellent Discourse on this subject, entitled, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost distinguished from Counterfeits*: in which he shews in what respects *Ministering Grace* differs from *Self-appointment*, *Illumination* from *human Assent*, and *Sanctification* from *Natural Reason*; also how they differ from the operations of the *unclean Spirit*; from the workings of our *own Spirits*, such as *pride, envy, avarice, or ambition*; and from the motions of *flesh and blood*, whether owing to *constitution, distemper, or to natural incentives* of any kind. In conclusion of the subject, he lays down three plain and easy rules for distinguishing betwixt true Inspiration and Illusion. 1. "That the truth of any *extraordinary* mission must rest on the promise of former Prophecies." 2. "The claims of Prophets must be supported by Miracles." 3. "That, for our more security, both must concur: the claim must be drawn from former Prophecies, and their Interpretation of such Prophecies supported by Miracles." See Sermon. 4. p. 161, 162. edit. 1742.—In Mr. Nott's Bampton Lectures, the subject of the testimony requisite to prove that a person pretending to a Divine commission to instruct mankind, is not misled by the delusions of an enthusiastic imagination, is clearly laid down, and its application to the pretensions of modern enthusiasts very ably illustrated. "Of external evidence," says the Author, "the criterions will be, the completion of Prophecy, and the working of Miracles. Those of internal evidence; the perfect agreement of the doctrines delivered, with all previous revelations, and with themselves. It is but necessary to add, that both the external and the internal evidence must be found united in support of the cause; for, when separate, they might justly be considered as forming a defective roof." Sermon. 4. p. 217.

P. 350. l. 2. *The gift of tongues was a sufficient evidence of their being "taught of God."*] Bishop Warburton, after

having ably vindicated this Miracle against the exceptions of Dr. Middleton, thus applies it, and the other extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, in proof of the Divine Inspiration of the Apostles:—"We have seen how fully gifted the Apostles were for the business of their Mission. They worked Miracles, they spake with Tongues, they explained Mysteries, they interpreted Prophecies, they discerned the true from the false pretences to the Spirit: and all this, for the temporary and occasional discharge of their Ministry. Is it possible, then, to suppose them to be deserted by their Divine Inlightener, when they sat down to the other part of their work; to frame a rule for the lasting service of the Church? Can we believe that that Spirit, which so bountifully assisted them in their assemblies, had withdrawn himself when they retired to their private oratories: or that when their *speech* was *with all power*, their *writings* should convey no more than the weak and fallible dictates of human knowledge? To suppose the endowments of the Spirit to be so capriciously bestowed, would make it look more like a mockery than a gift. And to believe all this would be a harder task than what (the Deists tell us) religious credulity imposes on us. No candid man therefore will be backward to conclude, that what powers the Apostles had for the temporary use of their Ministry, they had, in at least as large a measure, for the perpetual service of the Church." *Doctr. of Grace*, b. 1. ch. 5. See also Bp. Ward's *Serm. against the Anti-Scripturists*, p. 32.

P. 352. l. 2. *The mischief hence arising to the cause of Revelation itself, is also incalculably great.*] "See," says Bp. Bull, "the age we live in! *Enthusiasm* and *Atheism* divide the spoil, and the former makes way for the latter, till at length it be devoured by it. In the mean while, *Enthusiasm* fills the Conventicle, and empties the Church: silly people dance after it's pipe, and are lured by it from their lawful, orthodox Teachers, to run they know not whither, to hear they know not whom, and to learn they know not what. And till the minds of men are better informed, and possessed with righter notions of things, it is impossible they should ever be brought to any regular and sober Religion. Nothing in Religion will now-a-days be acceptable to many, but what pretends to a more immediate inspiration from God; and the bare colour thereof, be it never so small and slender, will almost make any thing pass for current Divinity. Let a man preach without authority, and without *book*, and make shew as if he did it *extempore*, and by the sudden suggestion of the

Spirit, and he shall be cried up by the vulgar, though he deliver the plainest nonsense." Bp. Bull's Sermon on 2 Tim. iv. 13. vol. 2. serm. 10. p. 423. Dr. Hickes, in his very learned and important Discourse, entitled, *Enthusiasm Exorcised*, dilates, at considerable length, and with great force of argument, on the injuries done to the true Religion of Christ, by those who "assert, that immediate Revelation, or Inspiration, is not *ceased*, but is a standing and perpetual gift in the Church of Christ, belonging to the very substance of the Gospel Covenant, and of indispensable necessity to the whole Body, and every member thereof: and that this Spirit of immediate Revelation, or spiritual Light, is not, like the Spirits in primitive times, to be tried by the Scriptures and Reason, but that both of them are to be tried by it." "This doctrine," he observes, "differs from the preceding [i. e. the *Pope's Infallibility*] only in this, that that makes only the *Bishop of Rome*, but this makes every private *Christian* a Pope: and as it utterly overthrows the authority of the Scriptures, and makes them an useless Rule of Faith; so hath it already cashiered the use of the Sacraments, and annulled the Ministerial Orders, contrary to the precepts and precedents of the Gospel, and the practice of God's universal Church."—Vol. 1. Sermon. 2. p. 98—109. To the same effect Bishop Ward observes: "The sum of all is this, the Divine Authority of the Scriptures is the great, fundamental, and comprehensive principle of Christianity, which being admitted, it stands, and being removed, it presently falls to the ground. Against this, therefore, the great Enemy of Religion, in these later days, (under pretence of Reason and Philosophy) directs his forces, and is said to have found a success very pernicious and deplorable. I humbly conceive, that the resolution of the belief of the Divine Authority of the Scriptures into the decrees of *Popes*, or determinations of *Councils*, with those who call themselves *Roman Catholics*; into *private* impulses and dictates of the Spirit, with the *Enthusiasts*; and into the *laws* and *edicts* of *Princes* and *Magistrates*, with our new pretenders to *Reason* and *Philosophy*; is that engine, whereby the Devil hath prevailed to scandalize the world, and cast it into Anti-scriptural Infidelity." *Sermon against the Anti-scripturists*, p. 68.

For more particular information on the subject of this Lecture, the reader is referred to the following works:—Bishop Williams's Boyle's Lect. serm. 5, 6, 7.—Bp. Blackall's Boyle's Lect. serm. 5, 6.—Dr. Clarke's Sermons, vol. 2. serm. 44. folio edition.—Bayley on Inspiration.—Calamy

on Inspiration.—Doddridge on Inspiration.—Moore on the plenary Inspiration of Scripture.—Findlay on the Inspiration of Scripture, in answer to Dr. Geddes.—Benson's Hist. of the first Planting of the Christian Religion, b. 1. ch. 1. sect. 1—4, and ch. 7. sect. 4.—Dr. Hey's Divinity Lectures, b. 1. ch. 12. sect. 3, and ch. 16. sect. 9.—Dr. Croft's Bampt. Lect. serm. 2.—Bp. Horsley's Ordination Sermon, (when Prebendary of Gloucester) on "*the Analogy between the Light of Learning and the Light of Inspiration.*"

### SERMON XXIV.

Many valuable and highly important observations on the Causes and Consequences of Infidelity may be found in the following excellent productions:—Abp. Tillotson's Sermons, vol. 2. serm. 64, 65, and vol. 3. serm. 188, 191, 192. edit. folio.—Bp. Atterbury's Sermons, vol. 1. serm. 5.—Bp. Sherlock's Sermons, vol. 1. serm. 3, 14. and vol. 3. serm. 1, 14.—Bp. Hurd's Sermons, vol. 2. serm. 4, 5, and vol. 3. serm. 2, 12.—Bp. Ward's Sermon on *the Sinfulness, Danger, and Remedies of Infidelity*, 12mo. 1670.—Bp. Williams's Boyle's Lect. serm. 16.—Bp. Gastrell's Boyle's Lect. vol. 1. p. 321—352. edit. folio.—Bp. Leng's Boyle's Lect. serm. 1, 2.—Dr. Gurdon's Boyle's Lect. serm. 2, 3.—Dr. Berriman's Boyle's Lect. serm. 1, 2.—Dr. Tottie's Sermons, serm. 1.—Mr. Jones's Sermons on *Spiritual Wickedness*, and on *the Age of Unbelief*; see his Works, vol. 5, and vol. 6.



# I N D E X.

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THE END.







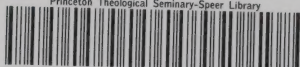








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